CHINESE FOLK-LORE TALES



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

CHINESE FOLK-LORE TALES

BY

REV. J. MACGOWAN, D.D.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1910

GLASGOW: PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.

CONTENTS

I

THE WIDOW HO

ONE day in the early dawn, a distinguished mandarin was leaving the temple of the City God. It was his duty to visit this temple on the first and fifteenth of the moon, whilst the city was still asleep, to offer incense and adoration to the stern-looking figure enshrined within.

This mandarin was Shih-Kung, and a juster or more upright official did not exist in all the fair provinces of the Empire. Wherever his name was mentioned it was received with the profoundest reverence and respect; for the Chinese people have never lost their ideal of Tien-Li, or Divine Righteousness. This ideal is still deeply embedded in the hearts of high and low, rich and poor; and the homage of all classes, even of the most depraved is gladly offered to any man who conspicuously displays this heavenly virtue.

As Shih-Kung was being carried along in his sedan chair, with his numerous retinue following closely behind him, he happened to notice a young woman walking in the road in front of him, and

began to wonder what it was that had brought her out at such an unusually early hour. She was dressed in the very deepest mourning, and so after a little more thought he concluded that she was a widow who was on her way to the grave of her late husband to make the usual offerings to his spirit.

All at once a sudden, furious whirlwind screamed about the woman and seemed determined to spend its force upon her; but beyond her nothing was touched by it. Not a leaf on the trees near by was moved, and not a particle of dust on the road, except just where she stood, was in the least agitated by the fierce tempest that for the moment raged around her.

As Shih-Kung gazed at this strange occurrence, the woman's outer skirt was blown up in the air, and he saw that underneath was another garment of a rich crimson hue. He then knew at once that there was something radically wrong, for no woman of ordinary virtuous character would ever dare to wear such a glaring colour, while she pretended to be in deep mourning. There was something suspicious, too, in the sudden tornado that blew with such terrific violence round the woman only. It was not an accident that brought it there. It was clearly the angry protest of some spirit who had been foully misused, and who was determined that the wrong-doer should not escape the penalty for the evil she had committed.

Calling two of his runners to him, Shih-Kung ordered them to follow the woman and to see where she was going and what she did there, and then to report to him immediately.

The two detectives obeyed his instructions to the very letter, and found that she went to a cemetery which lay on the hillside at the outskirts of the town. She had brought with her a goodly supply of gold and silver paper-money, such as is usually offered to the dead to enable them to purchase food and other necessaries in the Land of Shadows. She was preparing to set these on fire in order that they might reach the spirit for whom they were intended, when, much to the amazement of the runners, another tornado came with the same violence as before, and scattered the paper in all directions so that not a single piece was left to offer to the dead.

All this was duly reported to Shih-Kung, who at once sent a dispatch to the county magistrate, commanding him to investigate the case thoroughly, and giving him all the particulars of the extraordinary occurrences which had been witnessed.

This inferior mandarin was greatly puzzled as to how he should act in the matter. No complaint had reached him from anyone concerning the woman, and he had not a particle of evidence on which to proceed against her. In these circumstances, he determined to make an appeal to the City God to reveal to him a mystery that was beyond his powers to unravel. Accordingly, close upon the hour of midnight, he repaired to the temple of this famous idol and lay down to sleep, believing that, if he did so, he would be granted some revelation which would deliver him from his difficulties.

During the early hours of the morning, close upon

the break of day, a vision seemed to pass clearly before the mandarin's eyes.

He saw the grim god come out of his shrine and appear beyond the yellow curtains which hide his features from the unholy gaze of the crowds that every day flock to his temple. Immediately in front of him floated in the air the coffin of a full-grown man, which gradually settled on the table just below the altar, on which are placed the brazen bowls containing the ashes of the countless incense-sticks burned before the god to gain his favour.

After the lapse of but a moment the sleeping magistrate saw a man step up out of the surrounding darkness and take his stand at the head of the coffin.

There was something very familiar in the appearance of this mysterious individual who stood there so solemnly, and the mandarin felt that he had seen him before. Suddenly he recognized him as the Coroner of his own district, with whom he had often acted and whose reports were frequently submitted to him in cases where murder was suspected. He was so amazed by this discovery that he woke with a start, when the whole scene at once vanished from his gaze, and he could see nothing but the idol in its shrine, surrounded by the tawdry untidy articles that make up the furnishing of a temple.

By this time the dawn was sending its pale, silver light into the great, gloomy building; so the magistrate arose and hurried back to his yamen with a lightened heart, for the god had revealed to him that the grim secret which had so far evaded him lay in

the coffin of the dead, and was to be solved there and there only. His course now seemed easy, and it was with a mind full of relief that he entered his home.

He at once issued a warrant for the arrest of the widow, and at the same time sent officers to bring the coffin that contained the bodv of her husband from its burying-place.

When the widow appeared before the mandarin, she denied that she knew anything of the cause of her husband's death. He had come home drunk one night, she declared, and had fallen senseless on the ground. After a great deal of difficulty, she had managed to lift him up on to the bed, where he lay in a drunken slumber, just as men under the influence of liquor often do, so that she was not in the least anxious or disturbed about him. During the night she fell asleep as she watched by his side, and when she woke up she found to her horror that he was dead.

"That is all that can be said about the case," she concluded, "and if you now order an examination of the body, it simply means that you have suspicions about me, for no other person was with him but myself when he died. I protest therefore against the body being examined. If, however, you are determined to do so, I warn you that if you find no signs of violence on it, you expose yourself according to the laws of China to the punishment of death."

"I am quite prepared to take the responsibility," replied the mandarin, "and I have already ordered the Coroner to open the coffin and to make a careful examination of the body."

This was accordingly done, but no trace of injury, not even the slightest bruise, could be discovered on any part of the dead man's body.

The county magistrate was greatly distressed at this result of the enquiry, and hastened to Shih-Kung in order to obtain his advice as to what steps he should now take to escape the punishment of death which he had incurred by his action. The Viceroy agreed that the matter had indeed assumed a most serious aspect. "But you need not be anxious," he added, "about what you have done. You have only acted by my orders, and therefore I assume all responsibility for the proceedings which you have adopted to discover the murderer."

Late in the afternoon, as the sun began to disappear behind the mountains of the west, Shih-Kung slipped out by a side door of his yamen, dressed as a peddler of cloth, and with pieces of various kinds of material resting on his shoulders. His disguise was so perfect that no one, as he passed down the street, dreamed of suspecting that instead of being a wandering draper, he was in reality the Governor-General of the Province, who was trying to obtain evidence of a murder that had recently been committed in his own capital.

Travelling on down one street after another, Shih-Kung came at last to the outskirts of the town, where the dwellings were more scattered and the population was less dense. By this time it was growing dark, so when he came to a house that stood quite apart by itself, he knocked at the door. An elderly woman with a pleasant face and a

motherly look about her asked him in a kind and gentle voice what he wanted.

"I have taken the liberty," he replied, "of coming to your house to see whether you would not kindly allow me to lodge with you for the night. I am a stranger in this region," he continued, "and have travelled far from my home to sell my cloth. The night is fast falling, and I know not where to spend it, and so I beg of you to take me in. I do not want charity, for I am quite able to pay you liberally for any trouble I may cause you; and to-morrow morning, as early as you may desire, I shall proceed on my wanderings, and you will be relieved of me."

"My good man," she replied, "I am perfectly willing that you should lodge here for the night, only I am afraid you may have to endure some annoyance from the conduct of my son when he returns home later in the evening."

"My business leads me into all kinds of company," he assured her, "and I meet people with a great variety of dispositions, but I generally manage to get on with them all. It may be so with your son."

With a good-natured smile, the old lady then showed him into a little room just off the one which was used as a sitting room. Shih-Kung was very tired, so he threw himself down, just as he was, on a trestle bed that stood in the corner, and began to think over his plans for solving the mystery of the murder. By-and-by he fell fast asleep.

About midnight he woke up at the sound of

voices in the next room, and heard the mother saying:—"I want you to be very careful how you treat the peddler, and not to use any of your coarse language to him. Although he looks only a common man, I am sure he is a gentleman, for he has a refined way with him that shows he must have come from no mean family. I did not really want to take him in, as I knew you might object; but the poor man was very tired, and it was getting dark, and he declared he had no place to go to, so that at last I consented to let him stay. It is only for the night, and to-morrow at break of day he says he must be on his travels again."

"I do most strongly dislike having a strange man in the house," replied a voice which Shih-Kung concluded was the son's; "and I shall go and have a look at him in order to satisfy myself about him."

Taking a lantern in his hand, he came close up to where Shih-Kung was lying, and flashing the light upon his face, looked down anxiously at him for a few moments. Apparently he was satisfied, for he cried out in a voice that could easily be heard in the other room: "All right, mother, I am content. The man has a good face, and I do not think I have anything to fear from him. Let him remain."

Shih-Kung now considered that it was time for him to act. He stretched himself and yawned as though he were just waking out of sleep, and then, sitting up on the edge of the bed, he looked into the young man's face and asked him who he was.

"Oh!" he replied in a friendly way, "I am the son of the old lady who gave you permission to stay

here for the night. For certain reasons, I am not at all anxious to have strangers about the house, and at first I very much objected to have you here. But now that I have had a good look at you, my objections have all vanished. I pride myself upon being a good judge of character, and I may tell you that I have taken a fancy to you. But come away with me into the next room, for I am going to have a little supper, and as my mother tells me that you fell asleep without having had anything to eat, I have no doubt you will be glad to join me."

As they sat talking over the meal, they became very friendly and confidential with each other, and the sam-shu that the son kept drinking from a tiny cup, into which it was poured from a steaming kettle, had the effect of loosening his tongue and causing him to speak more freely than he would otherwise have done.

From his long experience of the shady classes of society, Shih-Kung very soon discovered what kind of a man his companion was, and felt that here was a mine from which he might draw valuable information to help him in reaching the facts he wished to discover.

Looking across the table at the son, whose face was by this time flushed with the spirit he had been drinking, and with a hasty glance around the room, as though he were afraid that some one might overhear him, he said in a low voice, "I want to tell you a great secret. You have opened your heart a good deal to me, and now I am going to do the same with you. I am not really a peddler of cloth, as I have

pretended to be. I have been simply using that business to disguise my real occupation, which I do not want anyone to know."

"And what, may I ask, may be the trade in which you are engaged, and of which you seem to be so ashamed that you dare not openly confess it?" asked the son.

"Well, I am what I call a benevolent thief," replied Shih-Kung.

"A benevolent thief!" exclaimed the other in astonishment. "I have never heard of such a thing before, and I should very much like to know what is meant by it."

"I must tell you," explained the guest, "that I am not a common thief who takes the property of others for his own benefit. I never steal for myself. My practice is to find out where men have made money unjustly, and then by certain means at my command I deprive them of some of their unlawful gains and distribute them amongst the people they have wronged. In this way I have been the means of bringing suitable punishment on the heads of the guilty, and at the same time of relieving the necessities of those who have suffered at their hands."

"I am astonished at what you tell me," replied the son, "though I do not believe all you say about not taking a share in the plunder you get. But now that you have opened your heart to me, I shall repay your confidence by telling you what I am. I am a real thief, and I support my mother, who does not suspect the truth, and keep the home together, simply by what I steal from others."

He then proceeded to give an account of some of the adventures he had met with in the course of his expeditions by night to rooms and houses which, as he always found out beforehand by careful spying, contained valuables that could be easily carried away.

While he was relating these stories, Shih-Kung's eyes gleamed with delight, for he saw that the man had fallen into the trap which had been laid for him, and felt confident that before the night was over he would be in possession of some clue to the mystery he was endeavouring to solve. He was disgusted with the sordid details of the criminal life of which the man before him seemed to be proud; yet with wonderful patience this mandarin, with his large powers of mind, and with a genius for statesmanship which had made him famous throughout the Empire, sat for hours enduring the wretched talk of this common thief. But his reward came in due time.

"By the way," exclaimed this man whose business it was to break into homes when the small hours of the morning found their inmates wrapped in slumber, "some time ago I had a most remarkable experience, and as you have shown yourself such a good fellow, I will tell you about it, if you do not think it too late to do so."

"I shall be most delighted to hear you relate it," said his guest. "I have been greatly entertained by your vivid way of describing the adventures through which you have passed. You deserve to be classed amongst the great heroes of old, who have made their names famous by their deeds of daring. Go on, I

pray you, and tell me the particulars of this unusual experience."

"Well," proceeded the man, "I had very carefully planned to pay a visit to a certain house just outside the walls of the city. It was an easy one to get in to without any danger of being observed, for it was in a quiet street, where passers-by are very few after dark. It was a gloomy place after sunset, for the high walls that looked down upon it threw deep and heavy shadows, which faint-hearted people declare are really unhappy and restless ghosts prowling about to harass and distress the unwary.

"It was a little after midnight, when with stealthy footsteps I crept along the narrow streets, keeping as much as I could under cover of the houses, where the darkness lay deepest. Every home was hushed in slumber. The only things that really troubled me were the dogs, which, with an intelligence far greater than that of their masters, suspected me of some evil purpose, and barked at me and made wild snaps at my legs. I managed, however, to evade them and finally to arrive at the house I intended to rob.

"When I got close up to it, I was surprised to find a light burning inside. There was another thing, too, that I could not understand, and this was that a little side door by which I had planned to enter had not been bolted, but had been left ajar so that any prowling robber could easily gain admittance through it. Taking off my shoes, I walked on tiptoe along the stone-paved courtyard in the direction of the room where the light was burning, and

hiding myself just outside the window, I could observe everything without being seen myself.

"I saw a woman of about thirty sitting alone by a table. She was evidently annoyed about something, for a frown rested on her face, and her eyes now and again flashed with suppressed anger, as though she had suffered some great wrong and wished to avenge it. I was just beginning to wonder when I should be able to attend to my own particular business, when I heard the side door slam, and the heavy staggering footsteps of a person under the influence of sam-shu sounded in the dark.

"I drew back a little further from the window. A man approached the room where the woman was sitting; lurching heavily, he sent the door open with a bang, fell down on the floor, and lay there perfectly insensible. He was a little insignificant fellow, whilst his wife was a vigorous, strapping woman. Looking at him with a world of contempt in her eyes, she came and picked him up and laid him on a bed that stood in the corner of the room.

"She then went back to her seat, but there was an evil look in the glances that she kept casting at her wretched husband. I was wondering to myself what was to be the end of this curious scene, when I saw her get up and go to a kind of wardrobe and take out a needle some two or three inches in length. She then undid her husband's dress, and seizing a mallet that lay on the table, she drove the needle deep down into his navel until it had entirely vanished in the flesh and not a trace of it was to be seen.

"The drunken man screamed as though in great agony, tossed convulsively on the bed, and then lay still and moved no more.

"I was so paralyzed with fear lest I should be implicated in this murder, that I dashed out of the house with all the speed I could command in the dark, and without stopping my flight for a single moment, I reached my home, terrified beyond measure at the awful scene that I had just witnessed.

"The only amusing part about the whole business was the inquest which was held the other day upon the body of the dead husband. I was present, and laughed in my sleeve at the whole proceedings. There was the Coroner, with solemn face, going through all the regular rules of examining the body for some proof that the man had been murdered. Then there was the county magistrate, questioning and threatening the woman as to the part she had played in the tragedy. And then, too, there was the wife, with sobs and sighs, and with tears running down her face, calling Heaven to witness that she had had nothing to do with the death of her husband. It was a splendid farce, carried out with wonderful acting by the wife, for there was not a flaw in her evidence, and no sign on the body to convict her of her crime.

"A few words from me would have settled the question in a moment, and the county magistrate, who seemed dreadfully distressed because of the responsibility he had incurred in the eyes of the law by holding an examination of the body without sufficient evidence to warrant him in so doing, would

have had his heart lightened of the load that was weighing it down if I could only have had the opportunity of whispering a single sentence into his ear."

"It is your duty," interposed his guest, "to proceed to-morrow morning to the mandarin's yamen, and tell your story to the county magistrate, so that a great wrong may not go unpunished."

"That I can never do," promptly replied the man. "What do you think would happen were I to do what you suggest? I am a thief. I get my living by thieving. I was in the house on the night of the murder for the purpose of robbery. That would all come out when I give my evidence. After I had proved the murder, what would become of me? I should be cast into prison, and I might have to lie there for years, for who would ever bail out a thief? And then my poor mother would starve, for she has to depend on me entirely for her living, and she would be compelled to go on the streets and beg for charity from door to door. No, it is impossible for me ever to interfere in this case."

Shih-Kung recognized the difficulty in which the man was placed, and yet without his evidence it would be impossible to convict the woman of the crime she had committed. He accordingly thought out a plan which he felt would remove the obstacles that stood in the way of securing him as a witness.

Turning to the man, he said "I have had a very pleasant evening with you, and I thank you for your courtesy and hospitality. I feel my heart moved with a desire for a deeper friendship than mere

words can ever express, and so I propose that you and I become sworn brothers, so that whatever may befall us in the future we shall stand by each other to the very death."

The young man looked up with astonishment at this unexpected proposal, but the sudden flash in his eyes and the smile that overspread his countenance showed that it was very pleasing to him.

"I shall be delighted to agree," he quickly replied, "but when shall we have an opportunity of appearing in the temple, and of registering our vow in the presence of the god?"

"There is no need to go to any temple," Shih-Kung replied. "Your family idol, which sits over there enshrined before us, will be quite sufficient for our purpose. Give me a pen and paper, and I will write out the articles of our brotherhood and present them to the god."

In a few minutes the document was written out according to the minute rules laid down by the law which binds two men in a sworn brotherhood. By the most solemn oaths Shih-Kung and this thief agreed to assist each other in any extremity in which either might be placed in the future. Any call from one to the other must be instantly responded to. No danger and no peril to life or limb must be allowed to deter either of them when the cry for help or deliverance was heard. Each was to regard the interests of the other as identical with his own, and as long as life lasted, the obligation to succour in every time of need could never be relaxed or annulled.

To prove that this solemn engagement was no mère passing whim of the moment, it had to be read in the hearing of the household god, who happened to be the Goddess of Mercy. She would then be an everlasting witness of the transaction, and with the invisible forces at her command would visit pains and penalties on the one who broke his oath. Standing in front of her shrine, Shih-Kung read out the articles of agreement, word by word, in a slow and measured tone suited to the solemnity of the occasion. He then lighted the paper at the lamp, and both men gazed at it until nothing was left but ashes, when each of them knew that the Goddess had received the document and had placed it in her archives in the far-off Western Heaven as a record of the vows made in her presence in those early hours of the morning.

When they sat down again, Shih-Kung looked with a strong and masterful gaze at his newly-created brother and said to him:—"You and I are now sworn brothers, and of course we must be frank with each other. I do not wish to deceive you any longer, so I must tell you that I am neither a peddler of cloth, nor a benevolent thief in the sense in which you understood the term. I am in fact Shih-Kung, the Viceroy of this Province."

No sooner did the man hear the name of this great mandarin, who was a profound source of terror to the criminals and evil-doers within his jurisdiction, than he fell on his knees before him in the most abject fright, and repeatedly knocking his head on the ground, besought him to have mercy on him.

Raising him up gently with his hand, Shih-Kung told him to lay aside all his fears. "You are my brother now," he said, "and we have just sworn in the presence of the Goddess to defend each other with our lives. I shall certainly perform my part of the oath. From this moment your fortune is made; and as for your mother, who received me with such gracious courtesy, it shall be my privilege to provide for her as long as she lives."

Emboldened by these words of the great statesman, the young man appeared at the second inquest, which Shih-Kung ordered to be held, and gave such testimony that the guilt of the wretched wife was clearly established, and due punishment meted out to her.

II

KWANG-JUI AND THE GOD OF THE RIVER

CHINA is a land where the great masses of the people have to toil and struggle incessantly in order to obtain even the bare necessities of daily existence. Unnumbered multitudes never enjoy a sufficiency of food, but have to be contented with whatever Heaven may send them; and profoundly thankful they are when they can be sure of two meals a day to stave off the pangs of hunger from themselves and their children.

How many there are who cannot by the severest toil obtain even these two meals is evident from the organized beggar communities, which are to be found in connection with every great city in the Empire, and from the vast numbers of tramps, who wander over the country on the highways and byways with pale and sodden faces and with garments nearly falling to pieces, picking up a scanty livelihood from the benevolent as they pass from village to village.

Whatever may be their inmost thoughts, the Chinese bear their terrible hardships and privations

with a splendid heroism, with little complaining, with no widespread outbreaks of robbery, and with no pillaging of rice-shops and public granaries by organized mobs driven mad by hunger.

There is one beautiful feature about the Chinese that has been an important factor in steadying the nation. They are imbued with at least one great ideal, which touches their common life in every direction. Every man in the Empire, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, has a profound respect for what he calls Tien-Li, or Divine Righteousness. By this the Chinese judge all actions. It is the standard by which Kings and Princes and common people direct their conduct, whether in the highest affairs of state, or in the ordinary engagements of common every-day life.

In addition to this, the minds of the Chinese are filled with romance and poetry, so that to them the invisible world is peopled with fairies and all kinds of spirits, both good and bad, the former relieving in mysterious ways the dull greyness that sorrow and disaster often shed upon the lives of men.

The story of Kwang-Jui is a remarkable evidence of the unbounded faith which the Chinese have in the intervention of these mysterious beings to deliver men from calamities which would otherwise prove fatal to them.

When we first meet with Kwang-Jui, he is living with his widowed mother in a retired part of the country. His father had been dead for some time, and Kwang-Jui was now the only one

upon whom the fortunes of the home could be built. He was a very studious lad, and was possessed of remarkable abilities, the result being that he successfully passed the various Imperial Examinations, even the final one in the capital, where the Sovereign himself presided as examiner.

After this last examination, as the men were waiting outside the Hall for the names of those who had satisfied the Emperor to be read out a considerable crowd had collected. Most of these people had come from mere curiosity to see the Imperial Edict, and to discover who the scholar was that stood first on the list. The excitement was intense, and speculation ran rife as to which of the candidates, who had come from almost every province in the Empire, was going to obtain the place of honour which was the dream and the ambition of every scholar in the land.

At last every breath was hushed, and every voice stilled in silence, as one of the high officials of the Palace, attended by an imposing retinue, came out of the great central doors, which had been flung wide open at his approach. In a clear voice he began to read the list. It was headed by the name of Kwang-Jui.

At this precise moment occurred an incident which was destined to change the whole current of Kwang-Jui's career. As he was standing overcome with emotion in consequence of the supreme honour which had been conferred upon him by the Emperor's Edict, a small round ball, beautifully embroidered, was thrown from an upper window

of a house across the way, and struck him on the shoulder.

It may here be explained that it was a custom in the early days of the history of China to allow any young maiden who was reluctant to have her husband chosen for her by her parents, to make use of what was called "The throwing of the embroidered ball" in order to discover the man whom the gods intended her to marry. This ball was made of some soft material, wrapped round with a piece of red silk which was covered with variegated figures, worked by the damsel's own hands and emblematic of the love by which the hearts of husband and wife are bound indissolubly to each other. It was firmly believed by every maiden of this romantic type that the man who was struck by the ball from her fair hands was the one whom Heaven had selected as her husband; and no parent would ever dream of refusing to accept a choice made in this way.

Whilst Kwang-Jui was gazing in amused wonder at the symbol which he understood so well, a messenger from the house from which it had been thrown requested him in respectful tones to accompany him to his master, who desired to discuss with him a most important subject.

As Kwang-Jui entered the house, he discovered to his astonishment that it belonged to the Prime Minister, who received him with the utmost cordiality, and after a long conversation declared that he was prepared to submit to the will of the gods, and to accept him as his son-in-law. Kwang-Jui was of

course in raptures at the brilliant prospects which were suddenly opening up before him. The day, indeed, was a red-letter one—an omen, he hoped, that fate was preparing to pour down upon him good fortune in the future. In one brief day he had been hailed as the most distinguished scholar in the Empire, and he had also been acknowledged as the son-in-law of the Empire's greatest official, who had the power of placing him in high positions where he could secure not only honours but also wealth sufficient to drive poverty away for ever from his home.

As there was no reason for delay, the hand of the beautiful daughter who had thrown the embroidered ball, and who was delighted that Heaven had chosen for her such a brilliant husband, was bestowed upon him by her parents. Times of great rejoicing succeeded, and when Kwang-Jui thought of the quiet and uninteresting days when he was still unknown to fame, and contrasted them with his present life, it seemed to him as though he were living in fairy-land. His wildest dreams in the past had never conjured up anything so grand as the life he was now leading. In one bound he had leaped from comparative poverty to fame and riches.

After a time, through the influence of his father-in-law, and with the hearty consent of the Emperor, who remembered what a brilliant student he had been, Kwang-Jui was appointed to be Prefect of an important district in the centre of China.

Taking his bride with him, he first of all proceeded to his old home, where his mother was waiting with great anxiety to welcome her now famous son. The old

lady felt rather nervous at meeting her new daughter-in-law, seeing that the latter came from a family which was far higher in rank and far more distinguished than any in her own clan. As it was very necessary that Kwang-Jui should take up his office as Prefect without any undue delay, he and his mother and his bride set out in the course of a few days on the long journey to the distant Prefecture, where their lives were destined to be marred by sorrow and disaster.

They had travelled the greater part of the way, and had reached a country market-town that lay on their route, when Kwang-Jui's mother, worn out with the toilsome journey, fell suddenly ill. The doctor who was called in shook his head and pronounced that she was suffering from a very serious complaint, which, whilst not necessarily fatal, would necessitate a complete rest for at least two or three months. Any further travelling must therefore be abandoned for the present, as it might be attended with the most serious consequences to the old lady.

Both husband and wife were greatly distressed at the unlucky accident which placed them in such an awkward position at this wayside inn. They were truly grieved at the serious sickness of their mother, but they were still more puzzled as to what course they should pursue in these most trying circumstances. The Imperial Rescript appointing Kwang-Jui to his office as Prefect commanded him to take up his post on a certain definite date. To delay until his mother would again be able to endure the fatigues of travel was out of the question, as disobedience to the Emperor's orders would be attended by his grave

displeasure. Eventually his mother suggested that he and his wife should go on ahead, and that after taking up the duties of his office he should then delegate them for a time to his subordinates and return to take her home.

This advice Kwang-Jui decided to carry out; though with great reluctance, as he was most unwilling to abandon his mother to the care of strangers. He accordingly made all the arrangements he possibly could for her comfort whilst they were parted from each other; he had servants engaged to attend upon her, and he left sufficient money with her to meet all her expenses during his absence

With a mind full of consideration for his mother, and wishing to show how anxious he was to give her pleasure, he went out into the market of the town to see if he could buy a certain kind of fish of which she was passionately fond. He had hardly got outside the courtyard of the inn, when he met a fisherman with a very fine specimen of the very fish that he wished to purchase.

As he was discussing the price with the man, a certain something about the fish arrested his attention. There was a peculiar look in its eyes that seemed full of pathos and entreaty. Its gaze was concentrated upon him, so human-like and with such intensity, that he instinctively felt it was pleading with him to do something to deliver it from a great disaster. This made him look at it more carefully, and to his astonishment the liquid eyes of the fish were still fixed upon him with a passionate regard that made him quiver with excitement.

"Fisherman," he said, "I want to buy this fish, and here is the price that you ask for it. I have but one stipulation to make, and that is that you take it to the river from which you caught it, and set it free to swim away wherever it pleases. Remember that if you fail to carry out this part of the bargain, great sorrow will come upon you and your home."

Little did either of them dream that the fish was the presiding God of the River, who for purposes of his own had transformed himself into this form, and who, while swimming up and down the stream had been caught in the net of the fisherman.

After travelling for some hours Kwang-Jui and his wife came to the bank of a considerable river, where they hired a large boat to convey them to their destination.

The boatman they engaged was a man of very low character. He had originally been a scholar and of good family, but, utterly depraved and immoral, he had gradually sunk lower and lower in society, until at last he had been compelled to fly from his home to a distant province, and there to engage in his present occupation in order to earn his living. The large amount of property which Kwang-Jui had with him seemed to arouse the worst passions in this man, and while the boat was being carried along by a fair wind and a flowing tide, he planned in his mind how he was to become the possessor of it. By the time that they reached the place where they were to anchor for the night, he had already decided what measures he should adopt.

A little after midnight, accordingly, he crept stealthily towards the place where Kwang-Jui was sleeping, stabbed him to the heart and threw his body into the fast-flowing river. He next threatened the wife that if she dared to utter a sound, he would murder her also and send her to join her husband in the Land of Shadows. Paralyzed with terror, she remained speechless, only a stifled sob and groan now and again breaking from her agonized heart. Her first serious idea was to commit suicide, and she was preparing to fling herself into the water that gurgled along the sides of the boat, when she was restrained by the thought that if she destroyed herself, she would never be able to avenge her husband's death or bring punishment upon the villain who had just murdered him.

It was not mere robbery, however, that was in the mind of the man who had committed this great crime. He had bigger ideas than that. He had noticed that in personal appearance he very much resembled his victim, so he determined to carry out the daring project of passing himself off as Kwang-Jui, the mandarin whom the Emperor had despatched to take up the appointment of Prefect.

Having threatened the widow that instant death would be her portion if she breathed a word to anyone about the true state of the case, and having arrayed himself in the official robes of the man whom he had stabbed to death, the boatman appeared at the yamen, where he presented the Imperial credentials and was duly installed in his office. It never entered his mind that it was not cowardice which

kept the widow silent, but the stern resolve of a brave and high-minded woman that she would do her part to see that vengeance should in time fall upon the man who had robbed her of a husband whom she looked upon as the direct gift of Heaven.

Now, immediately after the body of Kwang-Jui had been cast into the water, the customary patrol sent by the God of the River to see that order was kept within his dominions, came upon it, and conveyed it with all speed into the presence of the god himself.

The latter looked at it intently for a moment, and then exclaimed in great excitement, "Why, this is the very person who only yesterday saved my life, when I was in danger of being delivered over to a cruel death! I shall now be able to show my gratitude by using all the power I possess to serve his interests. Bring him to the Crystal Grotto," he continued, "where only those who have distinguished themselves in the service of the State have ever been allowed to lie. This man has a claim upon me such as no one before him ever possessed. He is the saviour of my life, and I will tenderly care for him until the web of fate has been spun, and, the vengeance of Heaven having been wreaked upon his murderer, he shall once more rejoin the wife from whom he has been so ruthlessly torn."

With the passing of the months, the widow of Kwang-Jui gave birth to a son, the very image of his father. It was night-time when he was born, and not long after his birth, a mysterious voice, which could not be traced, was heard distinctly saying,

"Let the child be removed without delay from the yamen, before the return of the Prefect, as otherwise its life will not be safe."

Accordingly, on the morrow, the babe, about whose destiny even Heaven itself seemed concerned, was carefully wrapped round with many coverings to protect it against the weather. Inside the inmost dress, there was enclosed a small document, telling the child's tragic story and describing the danger from a powerful foe which threatened its life. In order to be able to identify her son, it might be after the lapse of many years, the mother cut off the last joint of the little finger of his left hand; and then, with tears and sighs, and with her heart full of unspoken agony, she took a last, lingering look upon the face of the little one.

A confidential slave woman carried him out of her room, and by devious ways and secret paths finally laid him on the river's bank. Casting a final glance at the precious bundle to see that no danger threatened it, she hurried back in the direction of the city, with the faint cries of the abandoned infant still sounding in her ears.

And now the child was in the hands of Heaven. That this was so was evident from the fact that in a few minutes the abbot of the monastery, which could be seen crowning the top of a neighbouring hill, passed along the narrow pathway by the side of the river. Hearing a baby's cry, he hastened towards the place from which the sounds came, and picking up the little bundle, and realizing that the infant had been deserted, he carried it up to the monastery and

made every arrangement for its care and comfort. Fortunately he was a man of a deeply benevolent nature, and no more suitable person could have been found to take charge of the child.

We must now allow eighteen years to pass by. The child that had been left on the margin of the river had grown up to be a fine, handsome lad. The abbot had been his friend ever since the day when his heart had been touched by his cries, and his love for the little foundling had grown with the years. The boy had become a kind of son to him, and in order not to be parted from him he had taught him the temple duties, so that he was now a qualified priest in the service of the gods.

One morning the young man, whose name was Sam-Choang, came to the abbot with a restless, dissatisfied look on his face, and begged to be told who his father was, and who his mother. The old priest, who had long been aware of the tragic story of Kwang-Jui's murder, felt that the time had come when the lad ought to know what he had hitherto concealed from him. Taking out the document which he had found upon him as a baby, he read it to him, and then the great secret was out. After this a long and serious discussion took place between the two as to the wisest methods to be adopted for bringing the Prefect to justice and delivering the lad's mother from the humiliating position which she had so heroically borne for all these eighteen years.

The next day a young priest, with shaven head and dressed in the usual slate-coloured gown, appeared at the yamen of the Prefect to solicit subscriptions for

the neighbouring monastery. As the Prefect was absent on some public business, he was ushered into the reception-room, where he was received by his mother, who had always been a generous supporter of the Goddess of Mercy.

At the first sight of this striking-looking young bonze, she found her heart agitated in a strange and powerful way, such as she had not experienced for many a long year; and when she noticed that the little finger on his left hand was without the last joint, she trembled with the utmost excitement.

After a few words about the object for which he had come, the young priest slipped into her hand the very paper which she had written eighteen years ago; and as she looked at her own handwriting and then gazed into his face and saw the striking likeness to the man at whom she had thrown the embroidered ball, the mother-instinct within her flashed suddenly out, and she recognized that this handsome lad was her own son. The joy of the mother as she looked upon the face of Sam-Choang was reflected in the sparkling eyes and glowing look of pleasure that lit up his whole countenance.

Retiring for a short time his mother returned with a letter which she handed to him. In a low voice she told him that it was to her father, who still lived in the capital, and to whom he was to take it without any delay. In order to prevent suspicion on the part of the Prefect, he was to travel as a priest, who was endeavouring to obtain subscriptions for his monastery. He was to be sure, also, to visit the place where his grandmother had been left, and to try and

find out what had become of her. In order to defray his expenses she gave him a few bars of gold, which he could exchange for the current money at the banks on the way.

When Sam-Choang arrived at the inn where his father had parted with his grandmother, he could find no trace of her. A new landlord was in possession, who had never even heard her name; but on enquiring amongst the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood, he found to his horror that she was now a member of the beggars' camp, and that her name was enrolled amongst that degraded fraternity.

On reaching the wretched hovel where she was living, he discovered that when her money was exhausted and no remittance came to her from her son, she had been driven out on to the street by the innkeeper, and from that time had tramped the country, living on the scraps and bits which were bestowed upon her by the benevolent. Great was her joy when her grandson led her away to the best inn in the place, and on his departure gave her an ample supply of money for all her needs until they should meet again.

When Sam-Choang reached the capital and handed his mother's letter to his grandfather, the most profound excitement ensued. As soon as the Emperor was officially informed of the case, he determined that the severest punishment should be inflicted upon the man who had not only committed a cruel murder, but through it had dared to usurp a position which could only be held at the Sovereign's command.

An Imperial Edict was accordingly issued ordering the Prime Minister to take a considerable body of troops and proceed with all possible speed to the district where such an unheard-of crime had been committed, and there to hand over the offender to immediate execution.

By forced marches, so as to outstrip any private intelligence that might have been sent from the capital, the avenging force reached the city a little before the break of day. Here they waited in silence outside the city gates, anxiously listening for the boom of the early gun which announces the dawn, and at the same time causes the gates to be flung wide open for the traffic of the day to commence.

As soon as the warders had admitted the waiting crowd outside, the soldiers, advancing at a run, quickly reached the yamen, and arrested the Prefect. Without form of trial but simply with a curt announcement from the Prime Minister that he was acting upon instructions from the Emperor, the mandarin was dragged unceremoniously through the gaping crowds that rushed from their doors to see the amazing spectacle.

The feet of Fate had marched slowly but with unerring certainty, and had at last reached the wretched criminal.

But where was he being taken? This road did not lead to the execution ground, where malefactors were doomed to end their careers in shame. Street after street was passed, and still the stern-faced soldiers forced the mandarin down the main

thoroughfares, whose sides had often been lined with respectful crowds as he swept by with his haughty retinue. At last they reached the city gate, through which they marched, and then on towards the river, which could be seen gleaming like a silver thread in the distance.

Arrived at its bank, the troops formed into a square with the prisoner in the centre. Addressing him, the Prime Minister said, "I have selected this spot rather than the public execution ground where criminals are put to death. Your crime has been no common one; and so to-day, in the face of high Heaven whose righteousness you have dared to violate, and within sound of the flowing waters of the stream that witnessed the murder, you shall die."

Half a dozen soldiers then threw him violently to the ground, and in a few minutes the executioner had torn his bleeding heart from his bosom. Then, standing with it still in his hand, he waited by the side of the Prime Minister, who read out to the great multitude the indictment which had been drawn up against the Prefect. In this he described his crimes, and at the same time appealed to Heaven and to the God of the River to take measures to satisfy and appease the spirit of him who had been cut off in the prime of life by the man who had just been executed.

As soon as the reading of the document had been concluded, it was set fire to and allowed to burn until only the blackened ashes remained. These, together with the criminal's heart, were then cast into

the river. They were thus formally handed over to the god, who would see that in the Land of Shadows there should come a further retribution on the murderer for the crimes he had committed on earth.

The water patrol happened to pass by soon after the ashes and heart had been flung into the river, and picking them up most carefully, they carried them to the official residence of the god. The indictment was at once formally entered amongst the archives of the office, to be used as evidence when the case was in due time brought before the notice of Yam-lo: and after looking at the heart with the intensest scrutiny for some little time, the god exclaimed, "And so the murderer has at last received some part of the punishment he so richly deserved. It is now time for me to awake the sleeping husband, so that he may be restored to the wife from whom he has been separated for eighteen years."

Passing into the Crystal Grotto, where the unconscious form of Kwang-Jui had reposed for so many years, the god touched the body gently with his hand, and said:—"Friend, arise! Your wife awaits you, and loving ones who have long mourned you. Many years of happiness are still before you, and the honours that your Sovereign will bestow upon you shall place you amongst the famous men of the State. Arise, and take your place once more amongst the living!"

The Prime Minister was sitting with his daughter, listening to the sad story of the years of suffering through which she had passed, when the door was

silently opened, and the figure of her long-lost husband glided in. Both started up in fear and amazement, for they believed that what they saw was only a restless spirit which had wandered from the Land of Shadows and would speedily vanish again from their sight. In this, however, they were delightfully disappointed. Kwang-Jui and his wife were once more reunited, and for many a long year their hearts were so full of gladness and contentment, that the sorrows which they had endured gradually became effaced from their memories. They always thought with the deepest gratitude of the God of the River, who for eighteen years had kept the unconscious husband alive and had finally restored him to his heart-broken wife.

III

THE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER OF LIU-KUNG

In one of the central provinces of this long-lived Empire of China, there lived in very early times a man of the name of Chan. He was a person of a bright, active nature which made him enjoy life, and caused him to be popular amongst his companions and a favourite with every one who knew him. But he was also a scholar, well-versed in the literature of his country, and he spent every moment that he could spare in the study of the great writings of the famous men of former days.

In order that he might be interrupted as little as possible in his pursuit of learning, he engaged a room in a famous monastery some miles away from his own home. The only inhabitants of this monastery were a dozen or so of Buddhist priests, who, except when they were engaged in the daily services of the temple, lived a quiet, humdrum, lazy kind of existence which harmonized well with the solitude and the majestic stillness of the mountain scenery by which they were surrounded.

This monastery was indeed one of the most beautiful in China. It was situated on the slope of a hill, looking down upon a lovely valley, where the natural solitude was as complete as the most devoted hermit could desire. The only means of getting to it were the narrow hill footpaths along which the worshippers from the great city and the scattered villages wound in and out on festal days, when they came trooping to the temple to make their offerings to the famous God enshrined within.

Chan was a diligent student, and rarely indulged in recreation of any kind. Occasionally, when his mind became oppressed with excessive study he would go for a quiet walk along the hillside; but these occasions were few and far between, for he made up for every hour he spent away from his beloved books by still closer application to them in the hours that followed.

One day he was strolling in an aimless kind of way on the hillside, when suddenly a party of hunters from the neighbouring city of Eternal Spring came dashing into view. They were a merry group and full of excitement, for they had just sighted a fox which Chan had seen a moment before flying away at its highest speed in mortal dread of its pursuers.

Prominent amongst the hunters was a young girl, who was mounted on a fiery little steed, so full of spirit and so eager to follow in the mad chase after the prey, that its rider seemed to have some difficulty in restraining it. The girl herself was

a perfect picture. Her face was the loveliest that Chan had ever looked upon, and her figure, which her trim hunting dress showed off to the utmost advantage, was graceful in the extreme. As she swept by him with her face flushed with excitement and her features all aglow with health, Chan felt at once that he had lost his heart and that he was deeply and profoundly in love with her.

On making enquiries, he found that she was named Willow, that she was the daughter of the chief mandarin of the town in which she lived, and that she was intensely fond of the chase and delighted in galloping over the hills and valleys in the pursuit of the wild animals to be found there.

So powerfully had Chan's mind been affected by what he had seen of Willow, that he had already begun to entertain serious thoughts of making her his wife; but while his mind was full of this delightful prospect he was plunged into the deepest grief by hearing that she had suddenly died. For some days he was so stricken with sorrow that he lost all interest in life, and could do nothing but dwell on the memory of her whom he had come to love with all the devotion of his heart.

A few weeks after the news of her death, the quiet of the retreat was one day broken by a huge procession which wound its way along the mountain path leading to the monastery doors. On looking out, Chan saw that many of the men in this procession were dressed in sackcloth, and that in front of it was a band of musicians producing weird, shrill notes on their various instruments.

By these signs Chan knew that what he saw was a funeral, and he expected to see the long line of mourners pass on to some spot on the hillside where the dead would be buried. Instead of that, however, they entered through the great gates of the monastery, and the coffin, the red pall of which told him that it contained the body of a woman, was carried into an inner room of the building and laid on trestles that had been made ready for it.

After the mourners had dispersed, Chan asked one of the priests the name of the woman who had died, and how it was that the coffin was laid within the precincts of the temple instead of in the house of the deceased, where it could be looked after by her relatives and where the customary sacrifices to the spirit of the dead could be offered more conveniently than in the monastery.

The bonze replied that this was a peculiar case, calling for special treatment.

"The father of the poor young girl who died so suddenly," he said, "was the mandarin of the neighbouring city of Eternal Spring. Just after the death of his daughter an order came from the Emperor transferring him to another district, a thousand miles from here.

"The command was very urgent that he should proceed without delay to take up his post in the far-off province, and that he was to allow nothing to hinder him from doing so. He could not carry his daughter's body with him on so long a journey, and no time was permitted him to take the coffin to his home, where she might be buried amongst her own

kindred. It was equally impossible to deposit the coffin in the yamen he was about to leave, for the new mandarin who was soon to arrive would certainly object to have the body of a stranger in such close proximity to his family. It might bring him bad luck, and his career as an official might end in disaster.

"Permission was therefore asked from our abbot to allow the coffin to be placed in one of our vacant rooms, until the father some day in the future can come and bear the body of his beloved daughter to the home of his ancestors, there to be laid at rest amongst his own people.

"This request was readily granted, for whilst he was in office the mandarin showed us many favours, and his daughter was a beautiful girl who was beloved by everyone; and so we were only too glad to do anything in our power to help in this unhappy matter."

Chan was profoundly moved when he realized that the woman whom he had loved as his own life lay dead within a chamber only a few steps away from his own. His passion, instead of being crushed out of his heart by the thought that she was utterly beyond his reach, and by no possibility could ever be more to him than a memory, seemed to grow in intensity as he became conscious that it was an absolutely hopeless one.

On that very same evening, about midnight, when silence rested on the monastery, and the priests were all wrapped in slumber, Chan, with a lighted taper in his hand, stole with noiseless footsteps along the dark

passages into the chamber of death where his beloved lay. Kneeling beside the coffin with a heart full of emotion, in trembling accents he called upon Willow to listen to the story of his passion.

He spoke to her just as though she were standing face to face with him, and he told her how he had fallen in love with her on the day on which he had caught a glimpse of her as she galloped in pursuit of the fox that had fled through the valley from the hunters. He had planned, he told her, to make her his wife, and he described, in tones through which the tears could be heard to run, how heart-broken he was when he heard of her death.

"I want to see you," he continued, "for I feel that I cannot live without you. You are near to me, and yet oh! how far away. Can you not come from the Land of Shadows, where you are now, and comfort me by one vision of your fair face, and one sound of the voice that would fill my soul with the sweetest music?"

For many months the comfort of Chan's life was this nightly visit to the chamber where his dead love lay. Not a single night passed without his going to tell her of the unalterable and undying affection that filled his heart; and whilst the temple lay shrouded in darkness, and the only sounds that broke the stillness were those inexplicable ones in which nature seems to indulge when man is removed by sleep from the scene, Chan was uttering those love notes which had lain deeply hidden within his soul, but which now in the utter desolation of his heart burst forth to ease his pain by their mere expression.

One night as he was sitting poring over his books, he happened to turn round, and was startled to see the figure of a young girl standing just inside the door of his room. It seemed perfectly human, and yet it was so ethereal that it had the appearance of a spirit of the other world. As he looked at the girl with a wondering gaze, a smile lit up her beautiful features, and he then discovered to his great joy that she was none other than Willow, his lost love whom he had despaired of ever seeing again.

With her face wreathed in smiles, she sat down beside him and said in a timid, modest way:—"I am here to-night in response to the great love which has never faltered since the day I died. That is the magnet which has had the power of drawing me from the Land of Shadows. I felt it there, and many speak about it in that sunless country. Even Yam-lo, the lord of the spirits of that dreary world, has been moved by your unchanging devotion; so much so that he has given me permission to come and see you, in order that I might tell you how deeply my heart is moved by the profound affection that you have exhibited for me all these months during which you never had any expectation of its being returned."

For many months this sweet intercourse between Chan and his beloved Willow was carried on, and no one in the whole monastery knew anything of it. The interviews always took place about midnight, and Willow, who seemed to pass with freedom through closed doors or the stoutest walls, invariably vanished during the small hours of the morning.

One evening whilst they were conversing on topics agreeable to them both, Willow unburdened her heart to Chan, and told him how unhappy she was in the world of spirits.

"You know," she said, "that before I died I was not married, and so I am only a wandering spirit with no place where I can rest, and no friends to whom I can betake myself. I travel here and there and everywhere, feeling that no one cares for me, and that there are no ties to bind me to any particular place or thing. For a young girl like me, this is a very sad and sorrowful state of things.

"There is another thing that adds to my sorrow in the Land of Shadows," she went on to say, with a mournful look on her lovely countenance. "I was very fond of hunting when I was in my father's home, and many a wild animal was slain in the hunting expeditions in which I took an active part. This has all told against me in the world in which I am now living, and for the share I took in destroying life I have to suffer by many pains and penalties which are hard for me to endure.

"My sin has been great," she said, "and so I wish to make special offerings in this temple to the Goddess of Mercy and implore her to send down to the other world a good report of me to Yam-lo, and intercede with him to forgive the sins of which I have been guilty. If you will do this for me, I promise that after I have been born again into the world I will never forget you, and if you like to wait for me I shall willingly become your wife and serve you with the deepest devotion of which my heart is

capable, as long as Heaven will permit you and me to live together as husband and wife."

From this time, much to the astonishment of the priests in the monastery, Chan began to show unwonted enthusiasm for the service of the Goddess, and would sometimes spend hours before her image and repeat long prayers to her. This was all the more remarkable, as the scholar had rarely if ever shown any desire to have anything to do with the numerous gods which were enshrined in various parts of the temple.

After some months of this daily appeal to the Goddess of Mercy, Willow informed him that his prayers had been so far successful that the misery of her lot in the Land of Shadows had been greatly mitigated. The pleadings of the Goddess with Yam-lo had so influenced his heart towards Willow that she believed her great sin in the destruction of animal life had been forgiven, and there were signs that the dread ruler of the Underworld was looking upon her with kindness.

Chan was delighted with this news, and his prayers and offerings became still more frequent and more fervent. He little dreamed that his devotion to the Goddess would be the means of his speedy separation from Willow, but so it was. One evening she came as usual to see him, but instead of entering with smiling face and laughter in her eyes, she was weeping bitterly as though she were in the direst sorrow.

Chan was in the greatest distress when he saw this and asked her to explain the reason for her grief.

"The reason for my tears," she said, "is because after this evening I shall not see you again. Your petitions to the Goddess have had such a powerful effect upon her mind that she has used all her influence with Yam-lo to induce him to set me free from the misery of the Land of Shadows, and so I am to leave that sunless country and to be born again into life in this upper world."

As she uttered these words her tears began to flow once more and her whole frame was convulsed with sobbing.

"I am glad," she said, "that I am to be born once more and live amongst men, but I cannot bear the thought of having to be separated for so long from you. Let us not grieve too much, however. It is our fate, and we may not rebel against it. Yam-lo has been kinder to me than he has ever been to any one in the past, for he has revealed to me the family into which I am to be born and the place where they live, so if you come to me in eighteen years you will find me waiting for you. Your love has been so great that it has entered into my very soul, and there is nothing that can ever efface it from my heart. A thousand re-births may take place, but never shall I love any one as I love you."

Chan professed that he was greatly comforted by this confession of her love, but all the same he felt in despair when he thought of the future.

"When next I shall see you," he said with a sigh, "I shall be getting so old that you, a young girl in the first flush of womanhood, will not care to look at me. My hair will have turned grey and my face will

be marked with wrinkles, and in the re-birth you will have forgotten all that took place in the Land of Shadows, and the memory of me will have vanished from your heart for ever."

Willow looked with loving but sorrowful eyes upon her lover as he was expressing his concern about the future, but quickly assured him that nothing in the world would ever cause her to cease to remember him with the tenderest affection.

"In order to comfort you," she said, "let me tell you of two things that the dread Yam-lo, out of consideration for your love for me, has granted me—two things which he has never bestowed upon any other mortal who has come within the region of his rule. The first is, he has allowed me to inspect the book of Life and Death, in which is recorded the history of every human being, with the times of their re-births and the places in which they are to be born. I want you this very minute to write down the secret which has been revealed to me as to my new name and family and the place where I shall reside, so that you will have no difficulty in finding me, when eighteen years hence you shall come to claim me as your wife.

"The next is a gift so precious that I have no words in which to express my gratitude for its having been bestowed upon me. It is this. I am given the privilege of not forgetting what has taken place during my stay in the Land of Shadows, and so when I am re-born into another part of China, with a new father and mother, I shall hold within my memory my recollection of you. The years will pass quickly,

for I shall be looking for you, and this day eighteen years hence will be the happiest in my life, for it will bring you to me never more to be separated from me.

"But I must hasten on," she hurriedly exclaimed, "for the footsteps of fate are moving steadily towards me. In a few minutes the gates of Hades will have closed against me, and Willow will have vanished, and I shall be a babe once more with my new life before me. See, but a minute more is left me, and I seem to have so much to say. Farewell! Never forget me! I shall ever remember you, but my time is come!"

As she uttered these words, a smile of ineffable sweetness flashed across her beautiful face, and she was gone.

Chan was inexpressibly sad at the loss he had sustained by the re-birth of Willow, and in order to drive away his sorrow he threw his heart and soul into his studies. His books became his constant companions, and he tried to find in them a solace for the loneliness which had come upon him since the visits of Willow had ceased. He also became a diligent worshipper of the idols, and especially of the Goddess of Mercy, who had played such an important part in the history of his beloved Willow.

The years went slowly by, and Chan began to feel that he was growing old. His hair became dashed with silver threads, and wrinkles appeared in his forehead and under his eyes. The strain of waiting for the one woman who had taken complete possession of his heart had been too much for him. As

the time drew near, too, when he should go to meet her, a great and nervous dread began to fill him with anxiety. Would she recognize him? And would she, a young girl of eighteen, be content to accept as a husband a man so advanced in years as he now was? These questions were constantly flashing through his brain.

At last only a few months remained before he was to set out on his journey to the distant province where Yam-lo had decided that Willow was to begin her new life on earth.

He was sitting one evening in his study, brooding over the great problem that would be solved before long, when a man dressed in black silently entered the room. Looking on Chan with a kindly smile which seemed to find its way instantly to his heart, he informed him that he was a fairy from the Western Heaven and that he had been specially deputed by the rulers there to render him all the assistance in his power at this particular crisis, when they knew his heart was so full of anxiety.

"We have all heard in that far-off fairyland," he continued, "of the devotion you have shown to Willow, and how during all the years which have intervened since you saw her last you have never faltered in your love for her. Such affection is rare among mortals, and the dwellers in fairyland would like to help in bringing together two such loving hearts; for let me assure you that however strong your feeling for the one whom you are so anxious to see again, she on her part is just as deeply in love

with you, and is now counting the days until she will be able to see you and until you need never again be parted from each other. In order to assist in this happy consummation, I want you to take a short trip with me. It will only take a few hours, and you will then find that something has happened to remove all your fears as to how you will be received by Willow."

The fairy man then led Chan to the door, and gave a wave of his hand in the direction of the sky. Instantly the sound of the fluttering and swish of wings was heard, and in a moment a splendid eagle landed gracefully at their feet. Taking their seats upon its back, they found themselves flashing at lightning speed away through the darkness of the night. Higher and higher they rose, till they had pierced the heavy masses of clouds which hung hovering in the sky. Swift as an arrow the eagle still cleft its way upward until the clouds had vanished to an infinite distance below them; and still onward they were borne in the mighty stillness of an expanse where no human being had ever travelled before.

Chan felt his heart throb with a nervousness which he could not control. What if the bird should tire, he thought, and he should be dropped into the fathomless abyss below? Life's journey would then come to a tragic end. Where, too, was he being carried and how should he be ever able to return to his far-off home on the earth? He was becoming more and more agitated, when the fairy took hold of his hand and in a voice which at once stilled his

fears, assured him that there was not the least danger in this journey through the air.

"We are as safe here," he assured him, "as though we were standing upon a mountain whose roots lie miles below the surface of the earth. And see," he continued, pointing to something in the distance, "we shall arrive at our destination in the course of a few seconds."

True enough, he had hardly finished speaking when a land, fairer than Chan had ever seen on earth or pictured in imagination, loomed up suddenly in front of them; and before he could gather together his astonished thoughts, the eagle had landed them on its shores, and with outspread wings was soaring into the mystery of the unknown beyond.

The fairy now led Chan along a road surrounded by the most bewildering beauty. Rare flowers, graceful trees, and birds which made the groves resound with the sweetest music, were objects that kept his mind in one continual state of delight. Before long they arrived in front of a magnificent palace, so grand and vast that Chan felt afraid to enter within its portals, or even tread the avenue leading up to it.

Once more his companion relieved Chan's anxiety by assuring him that he was an expected guest, and that the Queen of this fairy country had sent him to earth specially to invite him to come and visit her, in order that she might bestow upon him a blessing which would enrich the whole of his life and would enable him to spend many happy years with her whom he had loved with such devotion.

Chan was ushered into a large reception hall, where he was met by a very stately lady, with a face full of benevolence, whom he at once recognized, from the images he had often worshipped, as the Goddess of Mercy. He was startled when he discovered in what august presence he was standing, and began to tremble with excitement as he realized that here in actual life was the famous personage whose image was worshipped by the millions of China, and whose influence spread even into the Land of Shadows.

Seeing Chan's humility and evident terror of her, the Goddess spoke to him in a gentle, loving voice, and told him to have no fear, for she had summoned him to her presence not to rebuke but to comfort him.

"I know your story," she said, "and I think it is a beautiful one. Before I was raised to the high position I now occupy I was at one time a woman like Willow, and I can sympathize with her in her devotion to you because of the wonderful love you have shown her from the first moment that you saw her.

"I know, too, your anxiety about your age, and your fear lest when Willow sees you with the marks of advancing years upon you, her love may die out and you will be left with your heart broken and in despair. I have foreseen this difficulty, and I am going to have it removed.

"The fairy who brought you here," she continued, "will now take you round the palace grounds, and if you will carry out my wishes, the fears which have

been troubling you for years shall entirely vanish. You will then meet Willow with a heart as light as that of any man in the flush of youth, who awaits the coming of the bridal chair which bears his future wife to his home."

Chan at once, without any hesitation, followed his guide through the spacious grounds which surrounded the palace, and was finally led to the edge of a beautiful little lake embowered amongst trees and ferns, and rare and fragrant flowers. It was the most exquisite scene on which his vision had ever rested.

With a kindly look at his companion, the fairy said, "This beautiful piece of water goes by the name of the 'Fountain of Eternal Youth,' and it is the Queen's express desire that you should bathe in it."

Quickly undressing, Chan plunged into the pool and for a moment sank beneath the surface of the waters. Emerging quickly from them, a delightful feeling of new-born strength seemed to be creeping in at every pore of his body. The sense of advancing age passed away, and the years of youth appeared to come back to him again. He felt as though he were a young man once more; for the weary doubts, which for some years past had made his footsteps lag, had gone with his first plunge into those fragrant waters.

By-and-by he came out of this "Fountain of Eternal Youth" with the visions and ambitions of his young manhood rushing through his brain. His powers, which seemed of late to have become dull

and sluggish, had recovered the impetus which in earlier years had carried him so successfully through many a severe examination. His thoughts, too, about Willow had so completely changed that instead of dreading the day when he should stand before her, his one passionate desire now was to start upon his journey to keep his appointment with her.

Chan and the fairy then proceeded to the edge of the vast and boundless expanse which bordered the palace of the Goddess, and found a magnificent dragon waiting to convey them back to earth. No sooner had they taken their seats on its back than it fled with the swiftness of the wind through the untrodden spaces of the air, until at length the mountains came looming out of the dim and shadowy distance, and with a rush Chan found himself safely landed at the door of the temple from which he had taken his departure for his amazing journey to the Western Heaven.

Whilst these wonderful things were taking place, Willow—or rather Precious Pearl, as she had been named by her new parents, who of course had no knowledge of her previous history—had grown up to be a most beautiful and fascinating woman.

During all these years she had never ceased to look forward with an anxious heart to the day when she would once more meet the man to whom she had betrothed herself eighteen years ago. Latterly she had begun to count the days that must still elapse before she could see him again. She never forgot the night in the temple when she bade him "Good-bye" just before she was reborn into this world.

The day and the hour had been stamped upon her memory, and since then the years had seemed to travel with halting, leaden feet, as though they were loth to move on. But now only a few months remained, and no doubt ever entered her brain that Chan would fail her.

Just about this time her mother had an offer of marriage for her from a very wealthy and distinguished family, and contrary to the usual custom of mothers in China she asked her daughter what she thought of the proposal. Pearl was distressed beyond measure, and prayed and entreated her mother on no account to broach the subject to her again, as she could never entertain any proposition of the kind.

Amazed at such a statement, her mother begged her to explain her reason for such strange views. "Girls at your age," she said, "are usually betrothed and are thinking of having homes of their own. This is the universal custom throughout the Empire, and therefore there must be some serious reason why you will not allow me to make arrangements for your being allied to some respectable family."

Pearl had been feeling that the time was drawing near when she would have to divulge the secret of her love affair, and she considered that now was the best opportunity for doing so. To the astonishment therefore of her mother, who believed that she was romancing, she told her the whole story of the past; how Chan had fallen in love with her, and how after she had died and had come under the control of Yam-lo in the Land of Shadows, that dread lord had permitted her spirit to visit her lover in the temple

where her body had been laid until a lucky resting-place could be found for it on the hillside. She also explained how it had been agreed between them that she was to wait for him until after the lapse of eighteen years, when she would be old enough to become his wife. "In a few months the time will be up," she concluded, "and so I beseech you not to speak of my being betrothed to any one else, for I feel that if I am compelled to marry any other than Chan I shall die."

The mother was thunderstruck at this wonderful story which her daughter told her. She could only imagine that Pearl had in some way or another been bewitched, and was under a fatal delusion that she was in love with some hero of romance, to whom she believed she was betrothed. Still, her daughter had always been most loving and devoted to her, and had shown more brightness and ability than Chinese girls of her age usually possessed. Her mother did not like, therefore, to reprove her for what she considered her ridiculous ideas, so she determined to try another plan to cure her of her folly.

"What age was this man Chan," she asked, "when you entered into this engagement with him?"

"He was just thirty," Pearl replied. "He was of very good family and a scholar, and had distinguished himself for his proficiency in the ancient literature of China."

"Oh! then he must be nearly fifty now. A fine mate he would make for you, a young girl of only eighteen! But who knows how he may have

changed since last you saw him? His hair must be turning grey, and his teeth may have fallen out; and for anything you know he may have been dead and buried so long ago that by this time they have taken up his bones, and nothing is left of him but what the funeral urn may contain of his ashes."

"Oh! I do pray that nothing of that kind has happened to him," cried Pearl, in a tone of voice which showed the anguish she was suffering. "Let us leave the question for a few months, and then when he comes for me, as I know he will, you will find by personal knowledge what a splendid man he is, and how entirely worthy he is of being your son-in-law."

On the day which had been appointed under such romantic circumstances eighteen years before, Chan arrived in the town, and after taking a room in an inn and making certain enquiries, he made his way to the home where he believed that Willow resided. On his arrival, however, he was roughly told by the servant that no such person as Willow lived there, and that they did not like strangers coming about the house. Indeed he was given plainly to understand that the sooner he left, the better everyone would be pleased. This treatment was of course part of a scheme devised by Pearl's parents to frustrate any plans that Chan might have formed for seeing her. They were determined not to give their daughter to a man so old as he must be, and therefore they decided that an interview between the two must be prevented at all hazards.

Chan was greatly distressed at the rebuff which

he had received. Had Willow after all made a mistake eighteen years ago when she gave him the name of this town as the place where her new home was to be? He had carefully written it down at her dictation, and it had been burned into his brain all the years since. No, there could be no mistake on that point. If there were any, then it was one that had been made purposely by Yam-lo in order to deceive them both. That idea, however, was unthinkable, and so there must be something else to account for his not finding Willow as he had expected. He at once made enquiries at the inn at which he was staying, and found that there was a daughter at the very house to which he had gone, and that in almost every particular the description he was given of her corresponded with his beloved Willow.

In the meantime, poor Pearl was in a state of the greatest anxiety. The eventful day on which she was to meet her lover had opened for her with keen expectation of meeting him after their long and romantic separation. She had never for one moment doubted that he would keep his engagement with her. An instinct which she could not explain made her feel certain that he was still alive, and that nothing in the world would prevent him from meeting her, as had been agreed upon between them at that eventful parting in the temple eighteen years before.

As the day wore on, however, and there were no signs of Chan, Pearl's distress became exceedingly pitiful; and when night came and her mother

declared that nothing had been seen of him, she was so stricken with despair that she lost all consciousness, and had to be carried to bed, where she lay in a kind of trance from which, for some time, it seemed impossible to rouse her

When at last she did regain consciousness, her mother tried to comfort her by saying that perhaps Chan was dead, or that he had forgotten her in the long course of years, and that therefore she must not grieve too much. "You are a young girl," she said, "and you have a long life before you. Chan is an old man by this time; no doubt he has long ago married, and the home ties which he has formed have caused him to forget you. But you need not be broken-hearted on that account. There are many other men who will be more suitable for you than he could possibly be. By-and-by we shall arrange a marriage for you, and then life will appear to you very different from what it does now."

Instead of being comforted, however, Pearl was only the more distressed by her mother's words. Her love, which had begun in the Land of Shadows, and which had been growing in her heart for the last eighteen years, was not one to be easily put aside by such plausible arguments as those she had just listened to. The result was that she had a relapse, and for several days her life was in great danger.

The father and mother, fearing now that their daughter would die, determined, as there seemed no other remedy, to bring Chan to their home, and see whether his presence would not deliver Pearl from

the danger in which the doctor declared she undoubtedly was.

The father accordingly went to the inn where he knew Chan was staying, and to his immense surprise he found him to be a young man of about twenty-five, highly polished in manner, and possessed of unusual intelligence. For some time he utterly refused to believe that this handsome young fellow was really the man with whom Pearl was so deeply in love, and it was not until Chan had told him the romantic story of his life that he could at all believe that he was not being imposed upon. Eventually, however, he was so taken with Chan that he became determined to do all in his power to bring about his marriage with his daughter.

"Come with me at once," he said, "and see if your presence will not do more than the cleverest doctors in the town have been able to accomplish. Pearl has been so distressed at not seeing you that she is now seriously ill, and we have been afraid that she would die of a broken heart."

When they arrived at the house Chan was taken into the sick-room, and the girl gazed into his face with a look of wonderment. "I do not seem to recognize you," she said in a feeble voice. "You are much younger than Chan, and although there is something about you that reminds me of him, I cannot realize that you are the same person with whom my spirit eighteen years ago held fellowship in the monastery where my body lay unburied."

Chan proceeded to explain the mystery. "For years," he said, "my mind was troubled about the

difference between our ages. I was afraid that when you saw me with grey hairs and with wrinkles on my face, your love would receive a shock, and you might regret that you had ever pledged yourself to me. Although you had vanished from my sight, my prayers still continued to be offered to the Goddess of Mercy. She had heard them for you, you remember, when you were in the Land of Shadows, and through her intercession Yam-lo had forgiven your sins, and had made life easier for you in that gloomy country.

"I still continued to pray to her, hoping in some vague way that she would intervene to bring about the desire of my heart, and that when in due time I should meet you again, every obstacle to our mutual love would be for ever removed.

"One day a fairy came into the very room where your spirit had often conversed with me. He carried me away with him to the Western Heaven and brought me into the very presence of the Goddess of Mercy. She gave directions for me to bathe in the 'Fountain of Eternal Youth,' and I became young again. That is why you see me now with a young face and a young nature, but my heart in its love for you has never changed, and never will as long as life lasts."

As he was telling this entrancing story, a look of devoted love spread over the beautiful countenance of Pearl. She gradually became instinct with life, and before he had finished speaking, the lassitude and exhaustion which had seemed to threaten her very life entirely disappeared. A rosy look came

over her face, and her coal-black eyes flashed with hidden fires.

"Now I know," she cried, "that you are Chan. You are so changed that when I first caught sight of you my heart sank within me, for I had pictured an older man, and I could not at once realize that you were the same Chan who showed such unbounded love for me in the years gone by.

"It was not that I should have loved you less even though you had really been older. My heart would never have changed. It was only my doubt as to your reality that made me hesitate, but now my happiness is indeed great; for since through the goodness of the Goddess you have recovered your youth, I need not fear that the difference between our years may in the near future bring to us an eternal separation."

In a few days Pearl was once more herself again. Her parents, delighted with the romantic turn that things had taken and highly pleased with Chan himself, arranged for the betrothal of their daughter to him; and in the course of a few months, the loving couple were united in marriage. And so, after years of waiting, the happy consummation was accomplished, which Heaven and the Goddess of Mercy and even the dread Ruler of the Land of Shadows had each taken a share in bringing about; and for many and many a long year the story of Chan and his wife was spread abroad throughout the region in which they lived.

IV

THE FAIRY BONZE

In a certain well-known and populous city in one of the north-western provinces of China, there once resided a man of the name of Meng. Everyone knew about him. His fame had spread not only throughout the town, but also far away into the country beyond; for of all the merchants who carried on business in this great commercial centre he was the wealthiest and the most enterprising.

He had begun life as a poor lad; but through great strength of purpose and positive genius for business, he had steadily risen step by step, until by the time our story opens, he had become exceedingly wealthy and was the acknowledged leader in all the great undertakings for which the city was famous.

Meng had always gained the admiration and affection of every one who became acquainted with him. He was of an artless, open-hearted disposition which won men to him, and his reputation for generosity made his name fragrant throughout the entire region in which he lived.

Forty years ago he had come to the city in search

of employment. His father was a farmer in one of the outlying country districts; but Meng, discontented with the dulness of the life and with the strain and trouble brought upon his home by bad seasons, started out for the great town to make his fortune.

All that he possessed he carried on his person. His stock-in-trade consisted simply of a stout bamboo pole and a good strong rope, the usual signs of a porter; but his willingness to oblige, and the hearty, pleasant way in which he performed his arduous duties, gained him the goodwill of all who employed him. Before many months had passed he was in constant demand, and was slowly saving up money that was to enable him to rise from the position of a coolie and to enter some business which would give him a more honourable place in society.

He had a shrewd and common-sense mind which enabled him to take advantage of any trade-opening that presented itself, and as he had a genial and happy disposition, everyone who had had any business relations with him was glad to do all in his power to give him a lift in the upward road along which he had made up his mind to travel. The result was that before many years had passed away he had established himself in a very lucrative line of business which brought a steady flow of wealth into his coffers.

In time he opened branches in distant cities, and his fame reached the far-off provinces in the East, where the merchant-princes who had dealings with him counted him as one of the most trustworthy of

their clients, to whom they were glad to give as much credit as he might desire.

There was one delightful feature about Meng, and that was the intense sympathy he had for his fellow-creatures He had a heart of gold that no prosperity could spoil; no one who ever applied to him for relief was sent away empty-handed. The struggling shopkeeper made his humble appeal when fate seemed determined to crush him, and the substantial loan that Meng made to him without hesitation kept him from closing his shutters and once more set him on his feet to commence the struggle again. The widow who had been left in absolute poverty had but to state her case, when with a countenance beaming with compassion and with eyes moist at her piteous story, Meng would make such arrangements for her and her children that the terror of starvation was lifted from her heart, and she left his presence with a smiling face and with heart-felt words of praise for the man who by his generosity had given her a new glimpse of life.

The character of Meng's mind may well be discovered from the manner in which he distributed a considerable portion of his riches amongst those who had been born under an unlucky star, and upon whom an unhappy fate had pressed heavily in the distribution of this world's goods and favours.

The generous men in China are not the rich. It is true that occasionally one does hear of a munificent donation having been made by some millionaire, but the public is never deceived by these unusual outbursts of generosity. There is a selfish motive at

the back of nearly every one of them, for the hope of the donors is that by gaining the favour of the mandarins they may obtain some high official position which will enable them to recoup themselves most handsomely for any sums they may have expended in charity.

Meng's deeds, however, were always purely unselfish, and no idea of reward ever entered his head. He was moved solely by a sincere desire to alleviate human suffering. The look of gladness that flashed over the faces of those whom he assisted, their gleaming eyes, and the words of gratitude that burst from their lips, were to him the sweetest payment that could possibly be made to him in return for the sums he had given away.

That Meng's fame had travelled far was shown by an occurrence which was destined to have a considerable influence on the fortunes of his only son, Chin, in whom his whole soul was bound up.

One day he received a letter from the head of a most aristocratic family in a distant city, begging that he would consent to an alliance with him. This man wrote that he had a daughter, who was declared by all who saw her to be possessed of no ordinary beauty, and he wished to have her betrothed to Meng's son. Meng's reputation for goodness and for love to his fellow-men had reached his ears, and he was anxious that their families should be united by the marriage of two young people.

The rich merchant, whose heart always retained its child-like spirit, was delighted with this proposal, which had come to him spontaneously, and not

through the intrigues of a middle-woman. He was also touched by the apparently generous spirit of the writer, so he at once responded to the appeal. After some little correspondence, the betrothal was drawn up in due form, and the young couple were bound to each other by legal ties which no court in the Empire would ever dream of unloosing.

Just at this juncture, when the tide in Meng's affairs seemed at its highest, there appeared at his doors one day a venerable-looking bonze, who asked to be received as a guest for a few days, as he was on a pilgrimage to a famous shrine and was tired out with the long journey that he had already made.

Meng, who was a very devout and religious man, gave the old priest a most hearty welcome. He placed one of the best rooms in the house at his disposal, and treated him with all the generous hospitality which he was accustomed to bestow upon men of his profession, who in travelling from one monastery to another had very often stayed with him for a night or two before proceeding further on their way.

Now, this priest had such pleasing manners, and was so refined and cultivated, that he completely captured the hearts of all the household, so much so that Meng insisted upon his prolonging his stay. The result was that months went by and the bonze still remained with him as his guest.

Everyone in the house seemed to be attracted by this stranger, so winning were his ways, and so full of quiet power were his whole bearing and character. He was affable and pleasant with all, but he seemed

to take most pleasure in the company of Chin, over whom he soon came to exercise a very powerful influence.

Their habit was to wander about on the hillside, when the priest would entertain his young friend with stories of the wonderful things he had seen and the striking adventures he had met with. His whole aim, however, seemed to be not so much to amuse Chin as to elevate his mind with lofty and noble sentiments, which were instilled into him on every possible occasion.

It was also their custom to retire every morning to some outhouses at the extremity of the large garden attached to the dwelling-house, where undisturbed they could converse together upon the many questions upon which the bonze was ready to discourse. One thing, however, struck Chin as very singular, and this was that the bonze made him collect certain curiously-shaped tiles, and bury them in the earthen floors of these little-used buildings. Chin would have rebelled against what he considered a child-like proceeding, but he was restrained by the profound love and veneration he felt for his companion.

At length the day came when the bonze announced that he must proceed upon his journey. He had already, he declared, stayed much longer than he had originally intended, and now the imperative call of duty made it necessary that he should not linger in the house where he had been so royally treated.

Seeing that he was determined in his purpose, Meng wanted to press upon him a considerable sum

of money to provide for any expenses to which he might be put in the future. This, however, the bonze absolutely refused to accept, declaring that his wants were few, and that he would have no difficulty in meeting them by the donations he would receive from the different temples he might pass on his way to his destination.

Little did Meng dream that the guest from whom he was parting with so heavy a heart was a fairy in disguise. Yet such was the case. The rulers of the far-off Western Heaven, who had been greatly moved by Meng's noble and generous life in succouring the distressed and the forlorn, had sent the bonze to make arrangements to meet a certain calamitous crisis which was soon to take place in the home of the wealthy merchant.

A few months after the good bonze had left them, a series of disasters fell with crushing effect upon the house of Meng. Several firms which owed him very large sums of money suddenly failed, and he found himself in such financial difficulties that it was utterly impossible for him to pay his debts.

In consequence, Meng was utterly ruined, and after paying out all that he possessed, even to the uttermost cash, found himself absolutely penniless. This so wrought upon his mind that he became seriously ill, and after a few days of intense agony, his spirit vanished into the Land of Shadows, and his wife and son were left desolate and bereaved.

After a time Chin bethought himself of the wealthy and distinguished man who had been so anxious to recognize him as a son-in-law, and after consultation

with his mother, who was completely broken-hearted, he set off for the distant city in which his proposed father-in-law lived. Chin hoped that the latter's heart would be moved by the disasters which had befallen his father, and that he would be willing to extend him a helping hand in his hour of dire sorrow, when even Heaven itself seemed to have abandoned him and to have heaped upon his head calamities such as do not often occur to the vilest of men.

Weary and worn with the long journey, which he had been compelled to make on foot, he arrived one day about noon at the gates which led into the spacious courtyard of the palatial mansion in which his father-in-law lived. The doors, however, were shut and barred, as though some enemy was expected to storm them and carry off the property within.

Chin called loudly to the porter to open them for him, but to his amazement he was told that orders had been received from the master of the house that he was not to be admitted on any terms whatsoever,

"But are you aware who I am?" he asked. "Do you not know that the man who owns this building is my father-in-law, and that his daughter is my promised wife? It ill becomes you therefore to keep me standing here, when I should be received with all the honours that a son-in-law can claim."

"But I have been specially warned against you," replied the surly gatekeeper. "You talk of being a son-in-law, but you are greatly mistaken if you imagine that any such kinship is going to be recognized in this house. News has reached my master of the utter failure of your father's business, and of

his death, and he declares that he does not wish to be mixed up in any way with doubtful characters or with men who have become bankrupt."

Chin, who was imbued with the fine and generous spirit of his father, was so horrified at these words that he fled from the gate, determined to suffer any indignity rather than accept a favour from a man of such an ignoble disposition as his father-in-law apparently possessed.

He was crossing the road with his heart completely cast down, and in absolute despair as to how he was ever to get back to his home again, when a woman in one of the low cottages by the roadside, beckoned him to come in and sit down.

"You seem to be in distress, sir," she said, "and to be worn out with fatigue, as though you had just finished a long journey. My children and I are just about to sit down to our midday meal, and we shall be so pleased if you will come and partake of it with us. I have just been watching you as you stood at the gate of that wealthy man's house, and I saw how roughly you were treated. Never mind," she continued, "Heaven knows how you have been wronged, and in time you will be avenged for all the injury you have suffered."

Comforted and gladdened by these kindly words and by the motherly reception given him by this poor woman, Chin started out on his return journey, and after much suffering finally reached his home. Here he found his mother in the direst poverty, and with a heart still full of the deepest woe because of the death of her noble-minded husband.

Almost immediately after Chin had been refused admission to the house of his father-in-law, the latter's daughter, Water-Lily, became aware of the insulting way in which he had been treated. She was grieved beyond measure, and with tears in her eyes and her voice full of sorrow, she besought her mother to appeal to her father on her behalf, and to induce him to give up his purpose of arranging a marriage for her with a wealthy man in the neighbourhood.

"My father may plan another husband for me," she said, "but I shall never consent to be married to anyone but Chin. All the rites and ceremonies have been gone through which bind me to him as long as I live, and to cast him off now because calamity has fallen upon his home is but to invite the vengeance of the Gods, who will surely visit us with some great sorrow if we endeavour to act in a way contrary to their laws."

The piteous appeals of Water-Lily had no effect upon her father, who hurried on the arrangements for his daughter's wedding to the new suitor, anxious to marry her off in order to prevent the unfortunate Chin from appearing again to claim her as his wife.

She, however, was just as determined as her father, and when she realized that all her entreaties and prayers had produced not the slightest effect upon him, and that in the course of a few days the crimson bridal chair would appear at the door to carry her away to the home of her new husband, she determined to adopt heroic methods to prevent the accomplishment of such a tragedy.

Next morning, as dawn began to break, the side-gate of the rich man's house was stealthily opened, and a degraded-looking beggar-woman stepped out into the dull grey streets, and proceeded rapidly towards the open country beyond.

She was as miserable a specimen of the whining, cringing beggar as could have been met with in any of the beggar-camps where these unhappy outcasts of society live. She was dressed in rags which seemed to be held together only by some invisible force. Her hair was tied up in disjointed knots, and looked as if no comb had ever tried to bring it into order. Her face was black with grime, and a large, dirty patch was plastered over one of her ears in such a way that its shape was completely hidden from the gaze of those who took the trouble to cast a passing glance upon her.

Altogether she was a most unattractive object; and yet she was the most lovely woman in all that region, for she was none other than Water-Lily, the acknowledged beauty of the town, who had adopted this disguise in order to escape from the fate which her father had planned for her.

For several weary months she travelled on, suffering the greatest hardships, and passing through adventures, which, if some gifted writer had collected them into a volume, would have thrilled many a reader with admiration for this brave young maiden. Though reared and nurtured in a home where every luxury was supplied her, yet she endured the degradation and privations of a beggar's life rather than be forced to be untrue to the

man whom she believed Heaven had given her as a mate.

One evening, as the shadows were falling thickly on the outer courtyard of the desolate house where Chin lived, a pitiful-looking beggar-woman stood timidly at the front door, gazing with wistful looks into the room which faced the street. Not a sound did she utter, not a single word escaped her lips to indicate that she had come there to obtain charity.

In a few minutes Chin's mother came out from a room beyond. When she saw this ragged, forlorn creature standing silently as though she were afraid that some word of scorn and reproach would be hurled at her, she was filled with a great and over-mastering pity, and stepping up to her she began to comfort her in loving, gentle language.

To her astonishment this draggled, uncleanly object became violently affected by the tender, motherly way in which she was addressed. Great tear-drops trickled down her grimy face, leaving a narrow, snow-like line in their wake. Presently she was convulsed with sobs that shook her whole body, whilst she wrung her hands as though some great sorrow was gripping her heart.

Mrs. Meng was deeply affected by the sight of this unhappy woman, and whilst she was gazing at her with a look of profound sympathy, the broad patch which had concealed and at the same time disfigured the beggar's countenance, suddenly dropped to the ground.

The effect of this was most startling, for a pair

of as beautiful black eyes as ever danced in a woman's head were now revealed to Mrs. Meng's astonished gaze. Looking at the stranger more intently, she saw that her features were exquisitely perfect, and had the grace and the poetry which the great painters of China have attributed to the celebrated beauties of the Empire.

"Tell me who you are," she cried, as she laid her hand tenderly and affectionately on her shoulder, "for that you are a common beggar-woman I can never believe. You must be the daughter of some great house, and have come here in this disguise in order to escape some great evil.

"Confide in me," she continued, "and everything that one woman can do for another, I am willing to do for you. But come in, dear child, and let us talk together and devise some plan by which I can really help you, for I feel my heart drawn towards you in a way I have never felt for any stranger before."

Mrs. Meng then led her into her bedroom, where Water-Lily threw off the outer garments in which she had appeared to the public as a beggar, and telling her wonderful story to Chin's mother, she revealed herself as her daughter-in-law.

But though her romantic arrival into this gloomy and distressed home brought with it a sudden gleam of happiness, the great question as to how they were to live had still to be solved. They were absolutely without means, and they could only hope to meet their meagre expenses by the sale of the house in which they were living.

At last this plan was discussed, and it was decided that the unused buildings, in which Chin and the Buddhist priest had been accustomed to spend a part of every day together, should be first of all disposed of.

In order to have some idea as to how much these outhouses were worth, Chin went to see what condition they were in, so that he might fix a price for them. As they had not been used for some time, the grass had grown rank about them, and they had a dilapidated and forlorn air which made Chin fear that their market value would not be very great.

Entering in by an open door, which a creeping vine, with the luxuriance of nature, was trying to block up, Chin looked round with a feeling of disappointment sending a chill into his very heart.

The air of the place was damp and musty. The white mould could be seen gleaming on the walls, as if it wished to give a little colour to the sombre surroundings. Great cobwebs flung their streaming banners from the beams and rafters overhead, whilst smaller ones, with delicate lace-like tracery, tried to beautify the corners of the windows, through which the light from the outside world struggled to enter the gloomy room.

Throwing the windows wide open to let in as much sunshine as was possible, Chin soon became convinced that the market value of this particular part of his property would be very small, and that unless he carried out extensive repairs, it would be impossible to induce any one to entertain the idea of buying it.

While he was musing over the problem that lay before him, his eye caught a silvery gleam from a part of the earthen floor, where the surface had evidently been scratched away by some animal that had wandered in.

Looking down intently at the white, shining thing which had caught his attention, Chin perceived that it was one of the tiles that the bonze had made him bury in the earth, and when he picked it up, he discovered to his amazement that in some mysterious manner it had been transformed into silver! Digging further into the earth, he found that the same process had taken place with every tile that had been hidden away beneath the floor of this old and apparently useless building.

After some days occupied in transporting his treasure to a safe place in his dwelling-house, Chin realized by a rough calculation that he was now the possessor of several millions' worth of dollars, and that from being one of the poorest men in the town he had become a millionaire with enormous wealth at his command.

Thus did the Gods show their appreciation of the noble life of Mr. Meng, and of his loving sympathy for the poor and the distressed, by raising his fallen house to a higher pinnacle of prosperity than it had ever attained even during his lifetime.

V

THE MYSTERIOUS BUDDHIST ROBE

THE short visit which the Emperor Li Shih-ming paid to the Land of Shadows had produced a profound impression on his mind. The pain and misery that men had to endure there, because of the evils they had committed in this life by their own voluntary action, had been brought before him in a most vivid manner. He had seen with his own eyes what he had always been unwilling to believe—namely, that wrong-doing is in every case followed by penalties, which have to be paid either in this world or the next.

He was now convinced that the doctrine of the sages on this point was true, for he had witnessed the horrors that criminals who had practically escaped punishment in this life had to suffer when they came under the jurisdiction of Yam-lo.

What distressed him most of all, however, was the grim thought which clung to him and refused to be silenced, that a large number of those in the Land of Shadows who were suffering from hunger and nakedness, were there as the result of his own cruelty

and injustice, and that the cries of these men and women would reach to Heaven, and in due time bring down vengeance on himself.

With this fear of coming judgment there was at the same time mingled in his mind an element of compassion, for he was really sorry for the poor wretches whom he had seen in the "City of the Wronged Ones," and whose reproaches and threats of divine vengeance had entered into his very soul.

He therefore determined to institute a magnificent service for those spirits of the dead, who through the injustice of rulers, or the impotence of law, or private revenge, had lost their lives and were suffering untold hardships in the other world. He would have prayers said for their souls, that would flood their lives with plenty, and in course of time would open up the way for their being reborn into the world of men.

In this way he would propitiate those whom he had injured, and at the same time accumulate such an amount of merit for his benevolence, that the gods would make it easy for him when his time of reckoning came, and the accounts of his life were made up and balanced.

As this ceremony was to be one such as had never before been held at any period of Chinese history, he was anxious that the man who should be the leader and conductor of it should not be one of the men of indifferent lives who are usually found in the Buddhist temples and monasteries. He must be a man of sterling character, and of a life so pure

and holy that no stain could be found upon it to detract from the saintly reputation he had acquired.

His Majesty accordingly sent out edicts to all the Viceroys in the Empire, commanding them to issue proclamations throughout the length and breadth of the country, telling the people of the great religious service which he was going to hold in the capital for the unhappy spirits in the Land of Shadows. In these edicts he ordered that search should be made for a priest of unblemished character—one who had proved his love for his fellow-men by great acts of sympathy for them. This man was to be invited to present himself before the Emperor, to take charge of the high and splendid service which had been designed by the Sovereign himself.

The tidings of this noble conception of Li Shih-ming spread with wonderful rapidity throughout his dominions, and even reached the far-off Western Heaven, where the mysterious beings who inhabit that happy land are ever on the alert to welcome any movement for the relief of human suffering. The Goddess of Mercy considered the occasion of such importance that she determined to take her share of responsibility for this distinguished service, by providing suitable vestments in which the leader of the great ceremony should be attired.

So it came to pass that while men's minds were excited about the proposed celebration for the dead, two priests suddenly appeared in the streets of the capital. No one had ever seen such old-fashioned and weird-looking specimens of manhood before. They were mean and insignificant in appearance, and

the distinctive robes in which they were dressed were so travel-stained and unclean that it was evident they had not been washed for many a long day.

Men looked at them with astonishment as they passed along the road, for there was something so strange about them that they seemed to have come down from a far-off distant age, and to have suddenly burst into a civilization which had long out-grown the type from which they were descended. But by-and-by their curious old-world appearance was forgotten in amazement at the articles they carried with them. These were carefully wrapped in several folds of cloth to keep them from being soiled, though the two priests were perfectly willing to unfold the wrappers, and exhibit them to anyone who wished to examine them.

The precious things which were preserved with such jealous care were a hat and robe such as an abbot might wear on some great occasion when the Buddhist Church was using its most elaborate ceremonial to perform some function of unusual dignity and importance. There was also a crosier, beautifully wrought with precious stones, which was well worthy of being held in the hand of the highest functionary of the Church in any of its most sacred and solemn services. The remarkable thing about the hat and robe was their exquisite beauty. The richness of the embroidered work, the quaint designs, the harmonious blending of colours, and the subtle exhibition of the genius of the mind which had fashioned and perfected them, arrested the attention of even the lowest class in the crowds of people who

gathered round the two priests to gaze upon the hat and robe, with awe and admiration in their faces.

Some instinct that flashed through the minds of the wondering spectators told them that these rare and fairy-like vestments were no ordinary products manufactured in any of the looms throughout the wide domains of the Empire. No human mind or hand had ever designed or worked out the various hues and shades of such marvellous colours as those which flashed before their eyes, and which possessed a delicacy and beauty such as none of the great artists of the past had ever been able to produce.

The priests from the various temples and monasteries of the capital soon heard the reports that spread through the city about the marvellous hat and robe, and flocked in large numbers to see these wonderful things, which the two curious-looking men were displaying to all who cared to gaze upon them.

"Do you wish to dispose of these things?" asked one of the city priests.

"If any one can pay the price at which alone we are prepared to sell, we shall be willing to part with them to him," was the reply.

"And what may the price be?" anxiously enquired the priest.

"The hat and robe will cost four thousand taels, and the crosier, which is of the rarest materials and manufacture, will be sold for the same amount."

At this a great laugh resounded through the crowd. In those days eight thousand taels was a huge fortune

which only one or two of the wealthiest men of the State could have afforded to give. The boisterous mirth, however, which convulsed the crowd when they heard the fabulous sums asked by these strangers for their articles, soon became hushed when the latter proceeded to explain that the sums demanded were purposely prohibitive, in order that the sacred vestments should not fall into the hands of anyone who was unworthy to possess them.

"You are all aware," said one of the strangers, "that His Majesty the Emperor, recognizing that the service for the dead which he is about to hold is one of momentous importance, not only to the spirits suffering in the Land of Shadows, but also to the prosperity and welfare of the Chinese Empire, has already issued edicts to secure the presence of some saintly and godly priest, who shall be worthy to superintend the prayers that will be said for the men and women who are leading dreary lives in the land over which Yam-lo rules."

The story of these two men spread with great rapidity throughout the homes of all classes in the metropolis, and when it was understood that they had no desire to make money by the rare and beautiful articles which they readily displayed to the crowds that followed them whenever they appeared on the streets, they began to be surrounded with a kind of halo of romance. Men whispered to each other that these were no common denizens of the earth, but fairies in disguise, who had come as messengers from the Goddess of Mercy. The garments which they had with them were such as no mortal eyes had ever

beheld, and were clearly intended for use only at some special ceremony of exceptional importance such as that which the Emperor was planning to have carried out.

At length rumours reached the palace of the strange scenes which were daily taking place in the streets of the capital, and Li Shih-ming sent officers to command the two strange priests to appear in his presence.

When they were brought before him, and he saw the wonderful robe embroidered in delicate hues and colours such as no workman had ever been known to design before, and grasped the crosier which sparkled and flashed with the brilliancy of the precious stones adorning it, the Emperor felt that the invisible gods had approved of his design for the solemn service for the dead and had prepared vestments for the High Priest which would be worthy of the exalted position he would occupy in the great ceremony.

"I hear that you want eight thousand taels for these articles," said the Emperor to the two men, who stood respectfully before him.

"We are not anxious, your Majesty," replied one of the strangers, "about the price. That is to us of very little importance. We have mentioned this large sum simply to prevent any man of unworthy mind from becoming their possessor.

"There is a peculiarity about that robe," he continued. "Any person of pure and upright heart who wears it will be preserved from every kind of disaster that can possibly assail him in this world. No sorrow can touch him, and the schemes of the most

malignant of evil spirits will have no influence upon him. On the other hand, any man who is under the dominion of any base passion, if he dares to put on that mystic robe, will find himself involved in all kinds of calamities and sorrows, which will never leave him until he has put it off and laid it aside for ever.

"What we are really here for," he concluded, "is to endeavour to assist your Majesty in the discovery of a priest of noble and blameless life who will be worthy of presiding at the service you are about to hold for the unhappy spirits in the Land of Shadows. When we have found him we shall consider that our mission has been fulfilled, and we can then return and report the success we have achieved."

At this moment despatches from high officials throughout the country were presented to the Emperor, all recommending Sam-Chaong as the only man in the dominions who was fit to act as High Priest in the proposed great service. As Sam-Chaong happened to be then in the capital, he was sent for and, being approved of by His Majesty, was at once appointed to the sacred office, which he alone of the myriads of priests in China seemed to be worthy of occupying.

The two strangers, who had been noting the proceedings with anxious and watchful eyes, expressed their delight at the decision that had been arrived at. Stepping up to Sam-Chaong with the most reverential attitude, they presented him with the costly vestments which had excited the wonder and admiration of everyone who had seen them. Refusing to receive any remuneration for them, they bowed

gracefully to the Emperor and retired. As the door of the audience-chamber closed upon them they vanished from human sight, and no trace of them could anywhere be found.

On the great day appointed by the Emperor, such a gathering was assembled as China in all the long history of the past had never before witnessed. Abbots from far-off distant monasteries were there, dressed in their finest vestments. Aged priests, with faces wrinkled by the passage of years, and young bonzes in their slate-coloured gowns, had travelled over the hills and mountains of the North to be present, and took up their positions in the great building. Men of note, too, who had made themselves famous by their devoted zeal for the ceremonies of the Buddhist Church and by their munificent gifts to the temples and shrines, had come with great retinues of their clansmen to add to the splendour and dignity of the occasion.

But the chief glory and attraction of the day to the assembled crowds was the Emperor, Li Shih-Ming. Never had he been seen in such pomp and circumstance as on this occasion. Close round him stood the princes of the royal family, the great officers of state and the members of the Cabinet in their rich and picturesque dresses. Immediately beyond were earls and dukes, viceroys of provinces and great captains and commanders, whose fame for mighty deeds of valour in the border warfare had spread through every city and town and hamlet in the Empire.

There were also present some of the most famous

scholars of China, who, though not members of the Buddhist Church, yet felt that they could not refuse the invitation which the Emperor had extended to them.

In short, the very flower of the Empire was gathered together to carry out the benevolent purpose of rescuing the spirits of the dead from an intolerable state of misery which only the living had the power of alleviating.

The supreme moment, however, was when Sam-Chaong and more than a hundred of the priests most distinguished for learning and piety in the whole of the church, marched in solemn procession, chanting a litany, and took their places on the raised platform from which they were to conduct the service for the dead.

During the ceremony, much to his amazement, Li Shih-Ming saw the two men who had bestowed the fairy vestments on Sam-Chaong, standing one on each side of him ; but though they joined heartily in the proceedings, he could not help noticing that a look of dissatisfaction, and occasionally of something which seemed like contempt, rested like a shadow on their faces.

At the close of the service he commanded them to appear before him, and expressed his surprise at their conduct, when they explained that the discontent they had shown was entirely due to a feeling that the ritual which had been used that day was one entirely inadequate to the occasion. It was so wanting in dignity and loftiness of conception, they said, that though some case might be brought to the

spirits suffering in the Land of Shadows from the service which had been performed, it would utterly fail in the most important particular of all—namely, their deliverance from Hades, and their rebirth into the land of the living.

That this was also a matter which had given the Goddess of Mercy a vast amount of concern was soon made evident to the Emperor, for in the midst of this conversation there suddenly sounded, throughout the great hall in which the vast congregation still lingered, a voice saying: "Send Sam-Chaong to the Western Heaven to obtain the ritual which shall there be given him and which shall be worthy of being chanted by a nation."

This command from the invisible Goddess produced such an impression upon the Emperor that he made immediate preparations for the departure of Sam-Chaong on his momentous journey; and in a few days, supplied with everything necessary for so toilsome an undertaking, the famous priest started on what seemed a wild and visionary enterprise in pursuit of an object which anyone with less faith than himself would have deemed beyond the power of any human being to accomplish.

In order to afford him protection by the way and to act as his body-servants, the Emperor appointed two men to accompany Sam-Chaong on the long journey which he had undertaken at the command of the Goddess of Mercy. His Majesty would indeed have given him a whole regiment of soldiers, if he had been willing to accept them; but he absolutely refused to take more than just two men. He

relied chiefly on the fairy robe which he had received, for that secured him from all danger from any foes whom he might meet on the road. Moreover, his mission, as he assured the Emperor, was one of peace and good-will, and it would not harmonize either with his own wishes or with those of the Goddess for him to be in a position to avenge his wrongs by the destruction of human life.

Before many days had elapsed Sam-Chaong began to realize the perilous nature of the service he had been called upon to perform. One afternoon, the travellers were jogging leisurely along in a wild and unsettled district, when suddenly two fierce-looking hobgoblins swooped down upon them, and almost before a word could be said had swallowed up both his poor followers. They were proceeding to do the same with Sam-Chaong when a fairy appeared upon the scene, and sent them flying with screams of terror to the caverns in the neighbouring hills where their homes seemed to be.

For a moment or two, Sam-Chaong was in extreme distress. He had just escaped an imminent peril; he was absolutely alone in an apparently uninhabited region; and the shadows of night were already darkening everything around. He was wondering where he would spend the night, when a man appeared upon the scene and invited him to come home with him to a mountain village on the spur of the hills which rose abruptly some distance away in front of them.

Although an entire stranger, who had never even heard Sam-Chaong's name, this man treated his

guest right royally and gave him the very best that his house contained. Deeply impressed with the generous treatment he had received, Sam-Chaong determined that he would repay his host's generosity by performing an act which would be highly gratifying both to him and to all the members of his household.

Arranging a temporary altar in front of the image of the household god, who happened to be the Goddess of Mercy, he chanted the service for the dead before it with such acceptance that the spirit of the father of his host, who had been confined in the Land of Shadows, was released from that sunless land and was allowed to be reborn and take his place amongst the living. Moreover, that very night, the father appeared before his son in a vision, and told him that in consequence of the intercession of Sam-Chaong, whose reputation for piety was widely known in the dominions of Yam-lo, he had been allowed to leave that dismal country and had just been born into a family in the province of Shensi.

The son was rejoiced beyond measure at this wonderful news, and in order to show his gratitude for this generous action, he volunteered to accompany Sam-Chaong right to the very frontiers of China and to share with him any dangers and hardships he might have to endure by the way.

After many weary days of travelling this part of the journey was at last accomplished, and they were about to separate at the foot of a considerable hill which lay on the border line between China and the country of the barbarians beyond, when a loud and

striking voice was heard exclaiming, "The priest has come! The priest has come!"

Sam-Chaong asked his companion the meaning of these words and to what priest they referred.

"There is a tradition in this region," replied the man, "that five hundred years ago, a certain fairy, inflamed with pride, dared to raise himself in rebellion against the Goddess of Mercy in the Western Heaven. To punish him she turned him into a monkey, and confined him in a cave near the top of this hill. There she condemned him to remain until Sam-Chaong should pass this way, when he could earn forgiveness by leading the priest into the presence of the Goddess who had commanded him to appear before her."

Ascending the hill in the direction of the spot from whence the cry "The priest has come!" kept ringing through the air, they came upon a natural cavern, the mouth of which was covered by a huge boulder, nicely poised in such a position that all exit from it was rendered an impossibility. Peering through the crevices at the side, they could distinctly see the figure of a monkey raising its face with an eager look of expectation in the direction of Sam-Chaong and his companion.

"Let me out," it cried, "and I will faithfully lead you to the Western Heaven, and never leave you until you find yourself standing in the presence of the Goddess of Mercy."

"But how am I to get you out?" asked Sam-Chaong. "The boulder that shuts you in is too large for human hands to move, and so, though I

pity you in your misfortune and greatly desire your help to guide me along the unknown paths that lie before me, I fear that the task of setting you free must fall to other hands than mine."

"Deliverance is more easy than you imagine," replied the monkey. "Cast your eye along the edge of this vast rock, which the Goddess with but a simple touch of one of her fingers moved into its place five hundred years ago, as though it had been the airiest down that ever floated in a summer's breeze, and you will see something yellow standing out in marked contrast to the black lichen-covered stone. That is the sign-manual of the Goddess. She printed it on the rock when she condemned me centuries ago to be enclosed within this narrow cell until you should come and release me. Your hand alone can remove that mystic symbol and save me from the penalty of a living death."

Following the directions of the monkey, Sam-Chaong carefully scraped away the yellow-coloured tracings which he tried in vain to decipher; and when the last faint scrap had been finally removed, the huge, gigantic boulder silently moved aside with a gentle, easy motion and tilted itself to one side until the prisoner had emerged, when once more it slid gracefully back into its old position.

Under the guidance of the monkey, who had assumed the appearance of a strong and vigorous young athlete, Sam-Chaong proceeded on his journey —over mountains so high that they seemed to touch the very heavens, and through valleys which lay at their foot in perpetual shadow, except only at noon-

tide when the sun stood directly overhead. Then again they travelled across deserts whose restless, storm-tossed, sandy billows left no traces of human footsteps, and where death seemed, like some cunning foe, to be lying in wait to destroy their lives.

It was here that Sam-Chaong realized the protecting care of the Goddess in providing such a valuable companion as the monkey proved himself to be. He might have been born in these sandy wastes, so familiar was he with their moods. There was something in the air, and in the colours of the sky at dawn and at sunset, that told him what was going to happen, and he could say almost to a certainty whether any storm was coming to turn these silent deserts into storm-tossed oceans of sand, which more ruthless even than the sea, would engulf all living things within their pitiless depths. He knew, moreover, where the hidden springs of water lay concealed beneath the glare and glitter that pained the eyes simply to look upon them; and without a solitary landmark in the boundless expanse, by unerring instinct, he would travel straight to the very spot where the spring bubbled up from the great fountains below.

Having crossed these howling wildernesses, where Sam-Chaong must have perished had he travelled alone, they came to a region inhabited by a pastoral people, but abounding in bands of robbers. Monkey was a daring fellow and was never afraid to meet any foe in fair fight; yet for the sake of Sam-Chaong, whose loving disposition had been insensibly taming his wild and fiery nature, he tried as far as possible

to avoid a collision with any evil characters, whether men or spirits, who might be inclined to have a passage of arms with them.

One day they had passed over a great plain, where herds of sheep could be seen in all directions browsing under the watchful care of their shepherds, and they had come to the base of the foot-hills leading to a mountainous country beyond, when the profound meditation in which Sam-Chaong was usually absorbed was suddenly interrupted by a startled cry from Monkey.

Drawing close up to him, he said in a low voice, "Do you see those six men who are descending the hill and coming in our direction? They look like simple-minded farmers, and yet they are all devils who have put on the guise of men in order to be able to take us unawares. Their real object is to kill you, and thus frustrate the gracious purpose of the Goddess, who wishes to deliver the souls in the Land of Shadows from the torments they are enduring there.

"I know them well," he went on; "they are fierce and malignant spirits and very bold, for rarely have they ever been put to flight in any conflict in which they have been engaged. They little dream, however, who it is you have by your side. If they did they would come on more warily, for though I am single-handed they would be chary of coming to issues with me.

"But I am glad," he continued, "that they have not yet discovered who I am, for my soul has long desired just such a day as this, when in a battle that

shall be worthy of the gods, my fame shall spread throughout the Western Heaven and even into the wide domains of the Land of Shadows."

With a cry of gladness, as though some wondrous good-fortune had befallen him, he bounded along the road to meet the coming foe, and in contemptuous tones challenged them to mortal combat.

No sooner did they discover who it was that dared to champion Sam-Chaong with such bold and haughty front, than with hideous yells and screams they rushed tumultuously upon him, hoping by a combined attack to confuse him and to make him fly in terror before them.

In this however they had reckoned without their host. With a daring quite as great as theirs, but with a skill far superior to that of the six infuriated demons, Monkey seized a javelin which came gleaming through the air just at the precise moment that he needed it, and hurled it at one of his opponents with such fatal effect that he lay sprawling on the ground, and with a cry that might have come from a lost spirit breathed his last.

And now the battle became a mighty one indeed. Arrows shot from invisible bows flew quicker than flashes of light against this single mighty fighter, but they glanced off a magic shield which fairy arts had interposed in front of him. Weapons such as mortal hands had never wielded in any of the great battles of the world were now brought into play; but never for a moment did Monkey lose his head. With marvellous intrepidity he warded them off, and

striking back with one tremendous lunge, he laid another of the demons dead at his feet.

Dismay began to raise the coward in the minds of those who were left, and losing heart they turned to those subtle and cunning devices that had never before failed in their attacks on mankind. Their great endeavour now was to inveigle Monkey into a position where certain destruction would be sure to follow. Three-pronged spears were hurled against him with deadly precision, and had he not at that precise moment leaped high into the air no power on earth could have saved him.

It was at this tremendous crisis in the fight that Monkey won his greatest success. Leaping lightly to the ground whilst the backs of his foes were still turned towards him, he was able with the double-edged sword which he held in each of his hands to despatch three more of his enemies. The last remaining foe was so utterly cowed when he beheld his comrades lying dead upon the road that he took to flight, and soon all that was to be seen of him was a black speck slowly vanishing on the distant horizon.

Thus ended the great battle in which Monkey secured such a signal victory over the wild demons of the frozen North, and Sam-Chaong drew near to gaze upon the mangled bodies of the fierce spirits who but a moment ago were fighting so desperately for their very lives.

Now, Sam-Chaong was a man who naturally had the tenderest heart for every living thing; and so, as he looked, a cloud of sadness spread

over his countenance and he sighed as he thought of the destruction of life which he had just witnessed. It was true that the demons had come with the one settled purpose of killing him, and there was no reason therefore why he should regret their death. But life to him was always precious, no matter in what form it might be enshrined. Life was the special gift of Heaven, and could not be wilfully destroyed without committing a crime against the gods.

So absorbed did Sam-Chaong become in this thought, and so sombre were the feelings filling his heart, that he entirely forgot to thank the hero by his side who had risked his life for him, and but for whose prowess he would have fallen a victim to the deadly hatred of these enemies of mankind. Feelings of resentment began to spring up in the mind of Monkey as he saw that Sam-Chaong seemed to feel more pity for the dead demons than gratitude for the heroic efforts which had saved him from a cruel death.

"Are you dissatisfied with the services I have rendered to you to-day?", he asked him abruptly.

"My heart is deeply moved by what you have done for me," replied Sam-Chaong. "My only regret is that you could not have delivered me without causing the death of these poor wretched demons, and thus depriving them of the gift of life, a thing as dear to them as it is to you or me."

Now Monkey, who was of a fierce and hasty temper, could not brook such meagre praise as this, and so in passionate and indignant language

he declared that no longer would he be content to serve so craven a master, who, though beloved of the Goddess, was not a man for whom he would care to risk his life again.

With these words he vaulted into the air, and soared away into the distance, on and on through countless leagues of never-ending sky, until he came to the verge of a wide-spreading ocean. Plunging into this as though it had been the home in which he had always lived, he made his way by paths with which he seemed familiar, until he reached the palace of the Dragon Prince of the Sea, who received him with the utmost cordiality and gave him an invitation to remain with him as his guest as long as he pleased.

For some time he entertained himself with the many marvellous sights which are hidden away beneath the waters of the great ocean and which have a life and imagery of their own, stranger and more mysterious perhaps than those on which men are accustomed to look. But in time he became restless and dissatisfied with himself. The unpleasant thought crept slowly into his heart that in a moment of passion he had basely deserted Sam-Chaong and had left him helpless in a strange and unknown region; and worse still that he had been unfaithful to the trust which the Goddess had committed to him. He became uncomfortably conscious, too, that though he had fled to the depths of the ocean he could never get beyond the reach of her power, and that whenever she wished to imprison him in the mountain cavern where he had eaten out

his heart for five hundred years, she could do so with one imperious word of command.

In this mood of repentance for his past errors, he happened to cast his eye upon a scroll which hung in one of the rooms of the palace. As he read the story on it his heart smote him, and from that moment he determined to hasten back to the post from which he had fled.

The words on the scroll were written in letters of gold and told how on a certain occasion in the history of the past the fairies determined to assist the fortunes of a young man named Chang-lung, who had gained their admiration because of the nobility of character which he had exhibited in his ordinary conduct in life. He belonged to an extremely poor family, and so without some such aid as they could give him, he could never attain to that eminence in the State which would enable him to be of service to his country. But he must first be tested to see whether he had the force of character necessary to bear the strain which greatness would put upon him. Accordingly one of the most experienced amongst their number was despatched to make the trial.

Assuming the guise of an old countryman in poor and worn-out clothing, the fairy sat down on a bridge over a stream close to the village where the favourite of the gods lived. By-and-by Chang-lung came walking briskly along. Just as he came up to the disguised fairy, the latter let one of his shoes drop into the water below. With an air of apparent distress, he begged the young man to wade into the stream and pick it up for him.

Cheerfully smiling, Chang-lung at once jumped into the water. In a moment he had returned with the shoe and was handing it to the old man, when the latter requested him to put it on his foot for him. This was asking him to do a most menial act, which most men would have scornfully resented; but Chang-lung, pitying the decrepit-looking old stranger, immediately knelt on the ground and carefully fastened the dripping shoe on to his foot.

Whilst he was in the act of doing this, the fairy, as if by accident, skilfully managed to let the other shoe slip from his foot over the edge of the bridge into the running stream. Apologizing for his stupidity, and excusing himself on the ground that he was an old man and that his fingers were not as nimble as they used to be, he begged Chang-lung to repeat his kindness and do him the favour of picking up the second shoe and restoring it to him.

With the same cheery manner, as though he were not being asked to perform a servile task, Chang-lung once more stepped into the shallow brook and bringing back the shoe, proceeded without any hesitation to repeat the process of putting it on the old man's foot.

The fairy was now perfectly satisfied. Thanking Chang-lung for his kindness, he presented him with a book, which he took out of one of the sleeves of his jacket, and urging him to study it with all diligence, vanished out of his sight. The meeting that day on the country bridge had an important influence on the destiny of Chang-lung, who in time rose

to great eminence and finally became Prime Minister of China.

As Monkey studied the golden words before him, he contrasted his own conduct with that of Chang-lung, and, pricked to the heart by a consciousness of his wrong, he started at once, without even bidding farewell to the Dragon Prince of the Sea, to return to the service of Sam-Chaong.

He was just emerging from the ocean, when who should be standing waiting for him on the yellow sands of the shore but the Goddess of Mercy herself, who had come all the way from her distant home to warn him of the consequences that would happen to him were he ever again to fail in the duty she had assigned him of leading Sam-Chaong to the Western Heaven.

Terrified beyond measure at the awful doom which threatened him, and at the same time truly repentant for the wrong he had committed, Monkey bounded up far above the highest mountains which rear their peaks to the sky, and fled with incredible speed until he stood once more by the side of Sam-Chaong.

No reproof fell from the latter's lips as the truant returned to his post. A tender gracious smile was the only sign of displeasure that he evinced.

"I am truly glad to have you come back to me," he said, "for I was lost without your guidance in this unknown world in which I am travelling. I may tell you, however, that since you left me the Goddess appeared to me and comforted me with the assurance that you would ere long resume your

duties and be my friend, as you have so nobly been in the past. She was very distressed at my forlorn condition and was so determined that nothing of the kind should happen again in the future, that she graciously presented me with a mystic cap wrought and embroidered by the fairy hands of the maidens in her own palace.

"'Guard this well,' she said, 'and treasure it as your very life, for it will secure you the services of one who for five hundred years was kept in confinement in order that he might be ready to escort you on the way to the Western Heaven. He is the one man who has the daring and the courage to meet the foes who will endeavour to destroy you on your journey, but he is as full of passion as the storm when it is blowing in its fury. Should he ever desert you again, you have but to place this cap on your head, and he will be wrung with such awful and intolerable agonies that though he were a thousand miles away he would hurry back with all the speed he could command to have you take it off again, so that he might be relieved from the fearful pains racking his body.'"

After numerous adventures too long to relate, Sam-Chaong reached the borders of an immense lake, many miles in extent, spanned by a bridge of only a single foot in width. With fear and trembling, as men tremble on the brink of eternity, and often with terror in his eyes and a quivering in his heart as he looked at the narrow foothold on which he was treading, he finally crossed in safety, when he found to his astonishment that the

pulsations of a new life had already begun to beat strongly within him. Beyond a narrow strip of land, which bounded the great expanse of water over which he had just passed, was a wide flowing river, and on its bank was a boat with a ferryman in it ready to row him over.

When they had reached the middle of the stream, Sam-Chaong saw a man struggling in the water as if for dear life. Moved with pity he urged upon the boatman to go to his rescue and deliver him from drowning. He was sternly told, however, to keep silence. "The figure you see there," said the boatman, "is yourself—or rather, it is but the shell of your old self, in which you worked out your redemption in the world beyond, and which you could never use in the new life upon which you have entered."

On the opposite bank of the river stood the Goddess of Mercy, who with smiling face welcomed him into the ranks of the fairies.

Since then, it is believed by those whose vision reaches further than the grey and common scenes of earthly life, Sam-Chaong has frequently appeared on earth, in various disguises, when in some great emergency more than human power was required to deliver men from destruction. There is one thing certain at least,—these gifted people declare—and that is that in the guise of a priest Sam-Chaong did once more revisit this world and delivered to the Buddhist Church the new ritual which the Goddess of Mercy had prepared for it, and which is used to-day in its services throughout the East.

VI

THE VENGEANCE OF THE GODDESS

IN a certain temple in the northern part of the Empire, there once lived a famous priest named Hien-Chung, whose reputation had spread far and wide, not merely for the sanctity of his life, but also for the supernatural powers which he was known to possess, and which he had exhibited on several remarkable occasions. Men would have marvelled less about him had they known that the man dressed in the long slate-coloured robe, with shaven head, and saintly-looking face, over which no one had ever seen a smile flicker, was in reality a pilgrim on his way to the Western Heaven, which he hoped to reach in time, and to become a fairy there.

One night Hien-Chung lay asleep in a room opening out of the main hall in which the great image of the Goddess of Mercy, with her benevolent, gracious face, sat enshrined amidst the darkness that lay thickly over the temple. All at once, there stood before him a most striking and stately-looking figure. The man had a royal look about him, as though he had been accustomed to rule. On his head there

was a crown, and his dress was such as no mere subject would ever be allowed to wear.

Hien-Chung gazed at him in wonder, and was at first inclined to believe that he was some evil spirit who had assumed this clever disguise in order to deceive him. As this thought flashed through his mind, the man began to weep. It was pitiable indeed to see this kingly person affected with such oppressive grief that the tears streamed down his cheeks, and with the tenderness that was distinctive of him Hien-Chung expressed his deep sympathy for a sorrow so profound.

"Three years ago," said his visitor, "I was the ruler of this 'Kingdom of the Black Flower.' I was indeed the founder of my dynasty, for I carved my own fortune with my sword, and made this little state into a kingdom. For a long time I was very happy, and my people were most devoted in their allegiance to me. I little dreamed of the sorrows that were coming on me, and the disasters which awaited me in the near future.

"Five years ago my kingdom was visited with a very severe drought. The rains ceased to fall; the streams which used to fall down the mountain-sides and irrigate the plains dried up; and the wells lost the fountains which used to fill them with water. Everywhere the crops failed, and the green herbage on which the cattle browsed was slowly blasted by the burning rays of the sun.

"The common people suffered in their homes from want of food, and many of the very poorest actually died of starvation. This was a source of great

sorrow to me, and every day my prayers went up to Heaven, that it would send down rain upon the dried-up land and so deliver my people from death. I knew that this calamity had fallen on my kingdom because of some wrong that I had done, and so my heart was torn with remorse.

"One day while my mind was full of anxiety, a man suddenly appeared at my palace and begged my ministers to be allowed to have an audience with me. He said that it was of the utmost importance that he should see me, for he had come to propose a plan for the deliverance of my country.

"I gave orders that he should instantly be brought into my presence, when I asked him if he had the power to cause the rain to descend upon the parched land.

"'Yes,' he replied, 'I have, and if you will step with me now to the front of your palace I will prove to you that I have the ability to do this, and even more.'

"Striding out to a balcony which overlooked the capital, and from which one could catch a view of the hills in the distance, the stranger lifted up his right hand towards the heavens and uttered certain words which I was unable to understand.

"Instantly, and as if by magic, a subtle change crept through the atmosphere. The sky became darkened, and dense masses of clouds rolled up and blotted out the sun. The thunder began to mutter, and vivid flashes of lightning darted from one end of the heavens to the other, and before an hour had elapsed the rain was descending in torrents all

over the land, and the great drought was at an end.

"My gratitude to this mysterious stranger for the great deliverance he had wrought for my kingdom was so great that there was no favour which I was not willing to bestow upon him. I gave him rooms in the palace, and treated him as though he were my equal. I had the truest and the tenderest affection for him, and he seemed to be equally devoted to me.

"One morning we were walking hand in hand in the royal gardens. The peach blossoms were just out, and we were enjoying their perfume and wandering up and down amongst the trees which sent forth such exquisite fragrance.

"As we sauntered on, we came by-and-by upon a well which was hidden from sight by a cluster of oleander trees. We stayed for a moment to peer down its depths and to catch a sight of the dark waters lying deep within it. Whilst I was gazing down, my friend gave me a sudden push and I was precipitated head first into the water at the bottom. The moment I disappeared, he took a broad slab of stone and completely covered the mouth of the well. Over it he spread a thick layer of earth, and in this he planted a banana root, which, under the influence of the magic powers he possessed, in the course of a few hours had developed into a full-grown tree. I have lain dead in the well now for three years, and during all that time no one has arisen to avenge my wrong or to bring me deliverance."

"But have your ministers of State made no efforts

during all these three years to discover their lost king?", asked Hien-Chung. "And what about your wife and family? Have they tamely submitted to have you disappear without raising an outcry that would resound throughout the whole kingdom? It seems to me inexplicable that a king should vanish from his palace and that no hue and cry should be raised throughout the length and breadth of the land until the mystery should be solved and his cruel murder fully avenged."

"It is here," replied the spirit of the dead king, "that my enemy has shown his greatest cunning. The reason why men never suspect that any treason has been committed is because by his enchantments he has transformed his own appearance so as to become the exact counterpart of myself. The man who called down the rain and saved my country from drought and famine has simply disappeared, so men think, and I the King still rule as of old in my kingdom. Not the slightest suspicion as to the true state of things has ever entered the brain of anyone in the nation, and so the usurper is absolutely safe in the position he occupies to-day."

"But have you never appealed to Yam-lo, the ruler of the Land of Shadows?", asked Hien-Chung. "He is the great redresser of the wrongs and crimes of earth, and now that you are a spirit and immediately within his jurisdiction, you should lay your complaint before him and pray him to avenge the sufferings you have been called upon to endure."

"You do not understand," the spirit hastily replied. "The one who has wrought such ruin in my life is

an evil spirit. He has nothing in common with men, but has been let loose from the region where evil spirits are confined to punish me for some wrong that I have committed in the past. He therefore knows the ways of the infernal regions, and is hand in glove with the rulers there, and even with Yam-lo himself. He is, moreover, on the most friendly terms with the tutelary God of my capital, and so no complaint of mine would ever be listened to for a moment by any of the powers who rule in the land of the dead.

"There is another very strong reason, too, why any appeal that I might make for justice would be disregarded. My soul has not yet been loosed from my body, but is still confined within it in the well. The courts of the Underworld would never recognize me, because I still belong to this life, over which they have no control.

"Only to-day," he continued, "a friendly spirit whispered in my ear that my confinement in the well was drawing to a close, and that the three years I had been adjudged to stay there would soon be up. He strongly advised me to apply to you, for you are endowed, he said, with powers superior to those possessed by my enemy, and if you are only pleased to exercise them I shall speedily be delivered from his evil influence."

Now the Goddess of Mercy had sent Hien-Chung a number of familiar spirits to be a protection to him in time of need. Next morning, accordingly, he summoned the cleverest of these, whose name was Hing, in order to consult with him as to how the

king might be delivered from the bondage in which he had been held for the three years.

"The first thing we have to do," said Hing, "is to get the heir to the Throne on our side. He has often been suspicious at certain things in the conduct of his supposed father, one of which is that for three years he has never been allowed to see his mother. All that is needed now is to get some tangible evidence to convince him that there is some mystery in the palace, and we shall gain him as our ally.

"I have been fortunate," he continued, "in obtaining one thing which we shall find very useful in inducing the Prince to listen to what we have to say to him about his father. You may not know it, but about the time when the King was thrown into the well, the seal of the kingdom mysteriously disappeared and a new one had to be cut.

"Knowing that you were going to summon me to discuss this case, I went down into the well at dawn this morning, and found the missing seal on the body of the King. Here it is, and now we must lay our plans to work on the mind of the son for the deliverance of the father. To-morrow I hear that the Prince is going out hunting on the neighbouring hills. In one of the valleys there is a temple to the Goddess of Mercy, and if you will take this seal and await his coming there, I promise you that I will find means to entice him to the shrine."

Next morning the heir to the Throne of the "Kingdom of the Black Flower" set out with a noisy retinue to have a day's hunting on the well-wooded hills overlooking the capital. They had scarcely

reached the hunting grounds when great excitement was caused by the sudden appearance of a remarkable-looking hare. It was decidedly larger than an ordinary hare, but the curious feature about it was its colour, which was as white as the driven snow.

No sooner had the hounds caught sight of it, than with loud barkings and bayings they dashed madly in pursuit. The hare, however, did not seem to show any terror, but with graceful bounds that carried it rapidly over the ground, it easily out-distanced the fleetest of its pursuers. It appeared, indeed, as though it were thoroughly enjoying the facility with which it could outrun the dogs, while the latter grew more and more excited as they always saw the quarry before them and yet could never get near enough to lay hold upon it.

Another extraordinary thing was that this hare did not seem anxious to escape. It took no advantage of undergrowth or of clumps of trees to hide the direction in which it was going. It managed also to keep constantly in view of the whole field; and when it had to make sudden turns in the natural windings of the road which led to a valley in the distance, where there stood a famous temple, it hesitated for a moment and allowed the baying hounds to come perilously near, before it darted off with the speed of lightning and left the dogs far behind it.

Little did the hunters dream that the beautiful animal which was giving them such an exciting chase was none other than the fairy Hing, who had assumed this disguise in order to bring the Prince to

the lonely temple in the secluded valley, where, beyond the possibility of being spied upon by his father's murderer, the story of treachery could be told, and means be devised for his restoration to the throne.

Having arrived close to the temple, the mysterious hare vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and not a trace was left to enable the dogs, which careered wildly round and round, to pick up the scent.

The Prince, who was a devoted disciple of the Goddess of Mercy, now dismounted and entered the temple, where he proceeded to burn incense before her shrine and in muttered tones to beseech her to send down blessings upon him.

After a time, he became considerably surprised to find that the presiding priest of the temple, instead of coming forward to attend upon him and to show him the courtesies due to his high position, remained standing in a corner where the shadows were darkest, his eyes cast upon the ground and with a most serious look overspreading his countenance.

Accordingly, when he had finished his devotions to the Goddess, the Prince approached the priest, and asked him in a kindly manner if anything was distressing him.

"Yes," replied Hien-Chung, "there is, and it is a subject which materially affects your Royal Highness. If you will step for a moment into my private room, I shall endeavour to explain to you the matter which has filled my mind with the greatest possible anxiety."

When they entered the abbot's room, Hien-Chung handed the Prince a small box and asked him to open it and examine the article it contained.

Great was the Prince's amazement when he took it out and cast a hurried glance over it. A look of excitement passed over his face and he cried out, "Why, this is the great seal of the kingdom which was lost three years ago, and of which no trace could ever be found! May I ask how it came into your possession and what reason you can give for not having restored it to the King, who has long wished to discover it?"

"The answer to that is a long one, your Highness, and to satisfy you, I must go somewhat into detail."

Hien-Chung then told the Prince of the midnight visit his father had made him, and the tragic story of his murder by the man who was now posing as the King, and of his appeal to deliver him from the sorrows of the well in which he had been confined for three years.

"With regard to the finding of the seal," he continued, "my servant Hing, who is present, will describe how by the supernatural powers with which he is endowed, he descended the well only this very morning and discovered it on the body of your father."

"We have this absolute proof," he said, "that the vision I saw only two nights ago was not some imagination of the brain, but that it was really the King who appealed to me to deliver him from the power of an enemy who seems bent upon his destruction.

"We must act, and act promptly," he went on, "for the man who is pretending to be the ruler of

your kingdom is a person of unlimited ability, and as soon as he gets to know that his secret has been divulged, he will put into operation every art he possesses to frustrate our purpose.

"What I propose, is that your Highness should send back the greater part of your retinue to the palace, with an intimation to the effect that you are going to spend the night here in a special service to the Goddess, whose birthday it fortunately happens to be to-day. After night has fallen upon the city, Hing shall descend into the well and bring the body of your father here. You will then have all the proof you need of the truth of the matter, and we can devise plans as to our future action."

A little after midnight, Hing having faithfully carried out the commission entrusted to him by Hien-Chung, arrived with the body of the King, which was laid with due ceremony and respect in one of the inner rooms of the temple. With his marvellous wonder-working powers and with the aid of invisible forces which he had been able to summon to his assistance, he had succeeded in transporting it from the wretched place where it had lain so long to the friendly temple of the Goddess of Mercy.

The Prince was deeply moved by the sight of his father's body. Fortunately it had suffered no change since the day when it was thrown to the bottom of the well. Not a sign of decay could be seen upon the King's noble features. It seemed as though he had but fallen asleep, and presently would wake up and talk to them as he used to do. The fact that

in some mysterious way the soul had not been separated from the body accounted for its remarkable preservation. Nevertheless to all appearance the King was dead, and the great question now was how he could be brought back to life, so that he might be restored to his family and his kingdom.

"The time has come," said Hien-Chung, "when heroic measures will have to be used if the King is ever to live again. Two nights ago he made a passionate and urgent request to me to save him, for one of the gods informed him that I was the only man who could do so So far, we have got him out of the grip of the demon that compassed his death, and now it lies with me to provide some antidote which shall bring back the vital forces and make him a living man once more.

"I have never had to do with such a serious case as this before, but I have obtained from the Patriarch of the Taoist Church a small vial of the Elixir of Life, which has the marvellous property of prolonging the existence of whoever drinks it. We shall try it on the King and, as there is no sign of vital decay, let us hope that it will be effective in restoring him to life."

Turning to a desk that was kept locked, he brought out a small black earthenware bottle, from which he dropped a single drop of liquid on to the lips of the prostrate figure. In a few seconds a kind of rosy flush spread over the King's features. Another drop, and a look of life flashed over the pallid face. Still another, and after a short interval the eyes opened and looked with intelligence upon

the group surrounding his couch. Still one more, and the King arose and asked how long he had been asleep, and how it came about that he was in this small room instead of being in his own palace.

He was soon restored to his family and to his position in the State, for the usurper after one or two feeble attempts to retain his power ignominiously fled from the country.

A short time after, Hien-Chung had a private interview with the King. "I am anxious," he said, "that your Majesty should understand the reason why such a calamity came into your life.

"Some years ago without any just reason you put to death a Buddhist priest. You never showed any repentance for the great wrong you had done, and so the Goddess sent a severe drought upon your Kingdom. You still remained unrepentant, and then she sent one of her Ministers to afflict you, depriving you of your home and your royal power. The man who pushed you down the well was but carrying out the instructions he had received from the Goddess. Your stay down the well for three years was part of the punishment she had decreed for your offence, and when the time was up, I was given the authority to release you.

"Kings as well as their subjects are under the great law of righteousness, and if they violate it they must suffer like other men. I would warn your Majesty that unless you show some evidence that you have repented for taking away a man's life unjustly, other sorrows will most certainly fall upon you in the future."

VII

"THE WONDERFUL MAN"

THERE is a certain Prefectural city in the south of China, which has earned a reputation distinguishing it from all such towns throughout the Empire.

In outward appearance this city is very much like every other of similar size. The streets are narrow, and the houses are crowded close up to each other. Every foot of land has been utilized, and no room has been left for sanitation, or for parks and open spaces, where the people may breathe the pure air of heaven. These things are modern inventions of the West and have never yet touched the thought or the life of the East, where sullen heat, fetid atmosphere, and stifling surroundings are the natural inheritance of the men and women who throng the cities and crowd and elbow each other in the great battle of life.

There was one thing, however, for which this city was deservedly celebrated. It had a great reputation for learning, and was famous as the abode of scholars.

In the main thoroughfares, where men with a

dexterity begotten of long experience just managed to evade jostling each other, the long-gowned students were conspicuous by their numbers. Their pale intellectual faces, and their gleaming black eyes burning with hidden fires, marked them out distinctly from the farmers and artisans and coolies, with their coarser, heavier features, who moved along side by side with them. And down the narrow alley-ways, where fetid smells and impure airs floated the live-long day, one's ear would catch the shrill tones of more youthful students, who in unhealthy rooms were mastering aloud the famous classics of China, in order that in time they might compete in the triennial examinations for the prizes offered by the Empire to its scholars.

The ambition for learning was in the air, and a belated wayfarer, wandering down the labyrinth of streets in the early hours of the morning, would hear the solemn stillness broken into by the voices of the students, as in their highest tones they repeated the writings of the great sages.

The town was therefore dear to the God of Literature, who has ever been ready to champion the cause of his scholars, whenever anyone has dared to lay a hand upon their privileges.

A legend in which there is widespread belief declares that on one occasion, when the scholars of five counties had assembled at a triennial examination, the Imperial Examiner, who for some reason or other had conceived a spite against the competitors from this particular city, determined that not one of them should pass.

As their essays came into his hands, he carefully laid them in a pile close beside him on the table. The God of Literature, who was sitting in his shrine at the far end of the room, became indignant at the insult that was about to be put on his favourites, and breathed some classic phrases under his breath, to the effect that he would never allow such a wrong to be perpetrated as long as he had power to prevent it.

The last paper had been examined and laid carefully on the top of the others, when, as if by a flash of lightning, the examiner was seized with a stroke of paralysis, and fell to the ground unconscious. That was the answer of the God to his evil schemes.

The greatest dismay was exhibited by the under-officials of the examination. Thousands of students were waiting outside for the list to be issued of those who had passed, but the only man who had the power to prepare this list lay helpless in the grip of paralysis. Yet something must be done, and that speedily. As they looked over the manuscripts lying on the table, a little pile was discovered, evidently placed there by the examiner for some purpose of his own. One of the officials at once suggested that these must belong to the men who had gained their degrees. The idea was enthusiastically accepted as the correct one. There was no need for further delay. The names of the writers were hurriedly copied out and pasted up on the board in front of the Examination Hall.

To the amazement of all the assembled scholars, the only men who had got their degrees were those belonging to the city favoured of the God. This was the God's second answer to the examiner, who would

unjustly have excluded them from the honours of the day.

There was another thing for which the people of this city were noted, and that was the pleasure taken by the leaders of society in recognizing those who displayed conspicuous civic virtues.

Outside one of the four gates, and well beyond the streets and houses which had grown up as an overflow from the great city, there was a considerable open space, through the middle of which the main road meandered on its way to the countless towns and villages in the regions beyond, and finally to the far-off capital, Peking, thousands of miles away in the extreme north. It was a busy, much-frequented road, and the tread of human feet and the sound of the voices of passing travellers never ceased from early dawn until darkness had fallen and driven men to the shelter of the city.

The striking feature about the long stretch of uninhabited land which bordered one side of this road was a magnificent series of memorial arches built in close succession to each other for a considerable distance. They were composed of granite slabs, some very plain in their design, whilst others were highly artistic, and had evidently been produced by men who were masters of their craft. The general plan and execution were the same in all, but the ornamentation in some was most elaborate, and filled one with pleasure and delight to look at it.

Every one of these arches had been erected to commemorate some person who had already passed away, but whose virtues in life had been so con-

spicuous that the community had determined that they should not be forgotten, but that a record of them should be handed down to posterity, not only to keep their memory fragrant, but also to provide beautiful examples for succeeding generations.

Amongst the virtues recorded on these granite slabs, the most common was that of filial piety. A son had distinguished himself by his devotion to his parents, and had sacrificed his very life in faithful service to them. In undying words the story was carved into the stone; and the two mystic characters, "Holy Will," in the centre of the middle arch showed that the Emperor had given his permission for the erection of this memorial to a virtue so admired by the whole Chinese nation.

Other arches, almost as numerous as those raised to dutiful sons, were those setting forth the virtues of widows who had refused to marry again after their husbands had died.

In one case a widow had been left in great straits, and had been compelled to struggle with poverty and privations of every kind. All these she might have avoided had she been willing to listen to the offers of marriage that were made to her. Nothing, however, could make her forget the allegiance which she believed she still owed to the man who had first won her heart, or induce her to neglect her duty to the children of her marriage. She could never consent to let them become the property of another man, who might despise and ill-treat them, and who at any rate would never have for them the kind of affection which would lead him to make the sacrifices necessary to

help them towards gaining a better position in life. Accordingly, she struggled on, enduring the greatest sufferings in order to provide for the needs of her sons as they gradually grew up; and eventually, owing to the hardships which she had borne so heroically, they all passed with honour through their examinations into the service of the Emperor.

On her death her story was forwarded to the capital, and his Majesty was so much moved by it that he gave his sanction for an arch to be erected to her memory, in order that for ages to come the crowds passing daily under its shadow might read the record of her self-sacrifice, and might learn how an admiring community had built this imperishable memorial of her wifely and motherly virtues.

But of all the numerous arches spanning the road there was one which attracted more attention than any other in the long line.

This was not because the virtues of the person, in whose honour it was raised, were so conspicuous, or because they so far outrivalled those recorded on the other arches, that men were constrained to stop and ponder over a life so remarkable for its heroism.

On the contrary, no virtues of any kind were mentioned. On the central arch, in large letters cut into the granite stone, were the words: "The Wonderful Man"; and that was all. Not a word of explanation was given as to who this wonderful man was; not a hint as to the special story of his life.

Scholars passing along the dusty road would catch a sight of this brief but cryptic inscription, and

would at once be set wondering what a phrase so unclassical and so mysterious could possibly mean. They would walk round to the other side of the arch, to see if any explanation were afforded there. But no, the inscription was simply repeated in the same cold and veiled language; and so they would pass on, no wiser than before.

Farmers, with produce of their own growing suspended from their shoulders on stout bamboo poles, would come along at their accustomed trot, and would gaze at these words, "The wonderful man," with a curious look on their faces. They were not profound scholars, for on account of their poverty they had been compelled to leave school before they had mastered the ancient characters which make up the Chinese written language; but they knew enough to read such simple words as these. But what did the words really mean? They would laugh and joke with each other about them as they sped on their way, and many a witty suggestion would be merrily thrown out as a solution of the mystery.

The story that really lay behind this strange inscription was after all a most romantic and a most pathetic one.

Many years before, in a village beyond the hills skirting the plain on which the city was built, there lived a family of three; that is to say, a man and his wife and their little son. It was a supremely happy home. The husband and wife were devotedly attached to each other, and the ambition of every family amongst the four hundred millions of China

had been granted them; for they had a son, who in the future would perpetuate the father's name, and present at his grave sacrificial offerings which would reach him in the Land of Shadows and keep him from starvation there.

The one great sorrow of the home was its poverty. There was no question but that they were exceedingly poor; and every morning, as the dawn broke upon them, they felt that they stood close up to the line beyond which lay hunger and even starvation.

But China is full of homes in such a situation. In this respect, indeed, the country is a land of heroes and heroines, for with vast masses of the people it is a daily struggle for food. Millions scattered throughout the Empire never or very rarely get enough to eat, and yet with splendid and pathetic patience they set themselves to suffer and to die, sternly and uncomplainingly, as becomes an Imperial race such as the Chinese are.

All that this particular family had to live upon were a few diminutive fields, which under the most favourable circumstances could produce barely enough sweet potatoes to keep body and soul together, and a scanty supply of vegetables with which to season them. If the rains failed and the potato vines were parched and blasted in their ridges by the great red-hot sun, then the husband had to look out for some other means of earning enough money to provide the bare necessaries of life for his little home.

Sometimes he would engage himself as a porter to carry the produce of the larger farmers to the great market-town which lay ten miles distant; but even

then he could earn only just enough to provide the most meagre fare for his family for a week or two at the very most.

At other times he would secure better-paid employment by carrying a sedan-chair to some distant place, which would take him from home for several days at a time. He would return, it is true, with some goodly strings of cash, which would make his wife's eyes gleam with satisfaction at the possibilities they contained for at least another month of better food for them all; but it was dearly earned money. The man had not been trained as a chairbearer, and so had not learned the knack of manipulating the cross-bars, which rested on his shoulders, in such a way as to make the heavy burden less distressing to him. The result was that every time he returned from one of these expeditions, he was so seriously knocked up that for several days he had to lie in bed, and refrain from all work.

Time went on, and the severe strain of his labour, and the poor quality of the food upon which he had to live, and the constant wear and tear of a constitution that never had been very strong, told upon the poor, overworked father. Gradually he became a confirmed invalid, so that he could not perform even the lightest work on his little farm. The shadows of coming misfortune grew darker and blacker every day. Hope began to abandon the hearts of husband and wife, and the sound of the footsteps of cruel Fate could almost be heard, as they drew nearer and nearer. Still these two heroic souls uttered no complaints, and there were no signs of heartbreak,

except occasionally when the wife's eyes overflowed with tears, which she brushed hastily away lest her husband should see them and be distressed.

One night the storm was blowing a north-east gale outside, and the wind howled and moaned in such weird and doleful tones around the cottage, that it seemed as though some troubled spirit had been let loose to wail out a solemn requiem over a departing soul.

The Chinese believe that the air is filled with demons who have a mortal hatred of human beings, and who are ever on the watch to compass their destruction. These evil spirits gather round when disaster is about to fall on a home. They stand with invisible forms and peer into the darkened room, where some one lies dying, and they breathe out their delight in unholy sounds that strike terror into the hearts of the watchers.

In her anxiety about her husband the wife had not been able to sleep. Her heart throbbed with an infinite pain, and suppressed sobs now and again showed the anguish of her spirit. She began to realize, during this dreadful night, that her husband was exceedingly ill and might very probably die. The storm which raged outside, and the furious blasts and the uncanny sounds in the air, had terrified her and made her nervous

It was true that only that day she had gone to the nearest temple, and had been assured by the god that her husband was going to recover; but he had been growing steadily weaker and weaker, and now the tempest had broken her courage and filled her

with an unspeakable dread. What a tumult there was outside! Whose were the hideous voices that shrieked round the building, and whose were the hands that tore at the doors and windows until they shook and rattled under their grasp?

At last she could stand it no longer. She felt she must get up and see whether the mad and furious spirits, who had evidently gathered in force around the dwelling, were going to prove to be true prophets of evil.

The room was in darkness, so she lit the tiny wick that lay in a saucer of oil, and, peering into her husband's face, she looked with all her heart in her eyes into his sunken features. He seemed to know her, for a wan and wintry smile flickered round his lips and died out in a moment. She gazed at him with an almost breaking heart, for her instinct told her that the greyness of his face and the sudden paling of his lips were the forerunners of death. A long-drawn sigh, and a sob or two, and the one who was the dearest to her in all the world had left her forever.

After the funeral, which swallowed up everything she possessed, even to the very fields, which she had been compelled to sell in order to meet the expenses, the widow was left almost destitute. She was a woman, however, with a very strong character, and she realized the absolute necessity of making up her mind at once as to her course of action. That she should marry again seemed to every one the only course open to her; but this she determined she would never do. The memory of her dead husband

was too precious to her, and besides it was her duty to rear up her little son to manhood, so that he might take his place amongst the scholars and thinkers of the Empire.

Soon a scheme, as original as it was daring, sprang up within her brain. No one must ever learn what it was. It must be the secret of her life, which she should bury within her own bosom, and which not even her own son should ever know, if she could possibly help it.

Having sold her cottage, she moved away to a quiet suburb outside the great city which was so renowned for learning. Then she discarded her woman's attire and dressed herself as a man. In no other way could she support herself and her child, for in China a woman is always under great disadvantages in the way of earning her own living. As a man, she knew that she could hold her own in any of the unskilled employments which she was capable of taking up. And so it turned out. She could carry as heavy a load as any of the men with whom she had to compete, and she was so civil and so well-behaved and so free from the use of profane language, that employers unaware of her sex used to pick her out in preference to others who offered themselves.

The years went by, and her little son was growing up to be a fine young man. The mother had determined that he should be a scholar. This was the one ambition of her life, and for this she slaved and toiled and denied herself almost the very necessaries of life.

Twenty years had passed since that stormy night. In the neighbouring city, the triennial examinations were just finished and the excitement was intense amongst the thousands of students who gathered round the Examination Hall to learn the names of the successful candidates.

By-and-by the son came home with a light step and with his eyes flashing with delight. His excitement was so great that he could hardly utter distinctly the words which rushed from his lips.

"Father," he cried, "the great desire of your heart and of mine has been granted to us to-day. I have passed, and that too with honours, for my name stands at the very top of the list of those who have been adjudged successful. And now, my beloved father, there will be no more hard work for you. My name will soon be flashed throughout the Province and will be posted in every Confucian guild, and scholars everywhere will speak with admiration of the great success I have won. My fortune has indeed been made, and it is due entirely to your self-denial, and to the sufferings and hardships you have consented to endure, during the long years of the past, that I have at length come into my kingdom, and that I need not be a labouring man, earning but a few cash a day, as you, my dear father, have been willing to do for the love of me."

All the time her son was talking, the mother's face shone with delight, for the hopes and wishes of a lifetime had come to her with a rush that almost overpowered her.

"Ah! if only my husband could have been with

us now," she thought, "to share with us the supreme joy of this moment!" And her memory wandered back to that dreadful night, the blackest she had ever known in her life; and the roar of the storm which had thundered round the poor little shanty of a home and the ominous wailings of the spirits of evil which had struck a chill into her very blood, once more sounded in her ears as though the tragedy had happened only the night before.

In the fulness of the new joy which had suddenly transformed his life, the son went on to talk of the plans that he had been mapping out for the future. There would be no lack of money any more, he said, for employment would open up to him in all directions. He would be invited by the wealthy men of the city to teach their sons. He was a notable scholar now, and men of means would compete with each other to secure his services.

Before long too, he would be certain to obtain a government appointment which would bring riches into the home; and then his father would be a gentleman, and would live with him in his yamen, and be treated by all with honour and respect. And so with glowing face and glistening eyes, as the visions of the future rose up before him, the boy talked on with the enthusiasm of youth, whilst his mother gazed at him with admiring eyes.

At last he suddenly stopped. The laughter died out of his countenance, and with a grave and solemn face he exclaimed, "Father, I want you to tell me where my mother is buried. I must arrange to go to her grave and make the proper offerings to her

spirit, and tell her how her son has prospered, and how grateful he is to her. That is my duty as a filial son, and I must not delay in performing it."

The young fellow did not notice the deadly pallor that spread over his parent's face as he uttered these words. He did not know that they produced a feeling of despair in the heart of his mother, for she now felt that she had come to the end of her life. She was a true and noble woman, with a high ideal of what a woman's life ought to be, and she dared not face the opinion of the world when it was discovered that she had lived as a man, and for many years had freely mingled with men. She had violated the laws of etiquette which regulate the conduct of women in every grade of society, and now the only thing left for her to do was to die.

Next morning, at sunrise, when the son entered his father's room, as was his daily custom, he found him lying upon his bed, dead, but marvellous to say, dressed in a woman's clothes. That the death was not accidental could be seen at a glance. The body lay prepared as if for a funeral. The clothes and the dressing of the hair, and the other minute details necessary in laying out a body for burial, had all been attended to. No outside hands need touch her, and no curious or unsympathetic eyes be gratified by peering too deeply into the mystery of her life.

The story spread with wonderful rapidity from the suburbs into the city. There it was discussed in every home, gentle and simple. The universal feeling was one of intense admiration for the devotion

and heroism which had caused the mother to sacrifice her life for her son, and the mandarins and scholars petitioned the Emperor to issue an edict permitting an arch to be erected in order that the memory of such a noble woman should be kept alive for ever.

This petition was granted; and it was decided that the inscription to be carved upon the arch should consist simply of these words: "THE WONDERFUL MAN."

VIII

THE GOD OF THE CITY

ONE evening in the distant past a fisherman anchored his boat near the bank of a stream which flowed close by a great city, whose walls could be seen rising grey and rugged in the near distance. The sound of life fell upon his ear and kept him from feeling lonely. Coolies, with bamboo carrying-poles on their shoulders, tired out with the heavy work of the day, hurried by afraid lest the darkness should overtake them before they reached their homes. The bearers of sedan-chairs, which they had carried for many a weary mile, strode by with quickened step and with an imperious shout at the foot passengers to get out of their way and not block up the narrow road by which they would gain the city walls before the great gates were closed for the night.

By the time that the afterglow had died out of the sky and the distant hills were blotted out of the horizon, the fisherman had finished the cooking of his evening meal. The rice sent a fragrant odour from the wide-mouthed pan in which it lay white and appetizing. A few of the very small fish he had

caught in the river had been fried to a brown and savoury-looking colour, and he was just about to sit down and enjoy his supper when, happening to look round, he saw a stranger sitting in the after part of the boat.

He was greatly amazed and was about to express his surprise, when something about the appearance of this unexpected visitor kept him spell-bound. For the stranger had a fine scholarly look about him, and the air of a man belonging to a good family. He had, moreover, a benevolent, kindly face, which could not fail to win the confidence of anyone who gazed upon it.

Whilst the fisherman was wondering who his visitor was and how he had managed to come so mysteriously into the boat, the stranger said: "Allow me to explain who I am and to apologise for intruding on you without first having got your permission to do so. I am the spirit of a man who two years ago was drowned not very far from where your boat is now anchored. Many attempts have I made to inveigle others into the river, so that I might be free to leave the spot to which my miserable fate binds me until another unhappy wretch shall take my place."

The spirit of a drowned person is condemned to hover round the spot where his life was lost, until, either by accident or by the wiles of the sufferer, someone else perishes in the water and thus takes the place of the spirit, which then travels with lightning speed to the Land of Shadows.

"I was so dull this evening," continued the stranger, "that I felt impelled to come and have a chat with

you for a short time. So I hope you will take my visit in good part, and allow me to sit in your boat until it is time for you to go to bed."

The fisherman, who was greatly taken with his courtly visitor, expressed his great pleasure in receiving him, and invited him to share his evening meal and to make himself quite at home for as long as he liked.

After this the solitary spirit of the river used frequently to come and spend an evening with the fisherman, until quite a friendship sprang up between them. One evening this ghostly visitor appeared with a face covered with smiles and with a glad note of joy in his voice. No sooner had he sat down than he said, "This is the last evening I shall be able to spend with you. The long weary time of waiting is now nearly at an end, and to-morrow another victim to the river will give me my release and you will see me no more"

Now, the fisherman was a deeply benevolent man, and he was most anxious to see what unhappy person was to be drowned on the morrow. About midday, as he was watching by the river-side, he saw a poor woman, weeping and sobbing, come rushing with hasty steps towards the water. Her hair was dishevelled, and her eyes red with tears, and frequent cries of sorrow burst from her lips Straight as an arrow she made for the stream, and was just preparing to throw herself into it, when the fisherman in a loud and commanding voice told her to stop.

He then asked her what was the matter and what reason there was for her to sacrifice her life in the river.

"I am a most unhappy woman," she replied. "On my way home just now I was waylaid by a footpad, who robbed me of some money that I was taking back to my husband. This money was to pay a debt we owed to a man who threatens us with the severest penalties if we do not give it to him to-day. Far rather would I face death than see the sorrow which would overwhelm my husband if I told him my sorrowful story."

Having asked her how much money had been taken from her, the fisherman presented the woman with the exact amount, and soon she was proceeding with joyful footsteps in the direction of her home.

That same evening the fisherman was again visited by the spirit who had bidden him an eternal farewell the previous evening.

"What did you mean," asked the visitor, "by depriving me of the one chance I had of gaining my freedom?"

"I could not bear to see the sorrow of the poor woman," replied the fisherman, "nor to think of the tragedy to her home had she perished in the stream, and so I saved her." With eloquent lips he proceeded to describe the beauty of benevolence, and urged upon his guest the nobler course of trying to save life even at the expense of his own happiness. In the end the latter was so deeply moved that he promised never again to make any attempt to gain his liberty through another's death, even though this should mean that he would have to spend long ages of misery in the fatal stream.

Years went by, and yet for the imprisoned spirit

there came no release. Cases of suicide or accidental drowning in the flowing stream ceased altogether. Many a life that would have perished was saved from destruction by mysterious warnings which came from the sullen water, and which terrified away the would-be suicides as they were about to hurl themselves into it.

At length Kwan-yin, the Goddess of Mercy, moved by the sight of such a generous sacrifice of self in order to save the souls of unfortunate people who had become weary of life, released this noble spirit from its watery prison. Moreover, as she felt convinced that such a man could safely be entrusted with the destinies of those who might appear before his tribunal, she made him a god and decreed that temples should be erected to him in every town and city of the Empire, so that all who were suffering wrong or injustice could have their causes righted at the shrine of one who had shown such profound devotion and sympathy for others in distress.

Such is the story of the God of the City.

Since he is regarded as the representative of the dread ruler of the Land of Shadows, his temple has been erected very much in the same style as the courts of the Mandarins. Its main entrance is large and imposing, and the great gates suggest those of the yamen of some high official.

Within these is an immense courtyard, paved with slabs of granite, and on each side of this there are six life-size statues of the "runners," or policemen, of the god, who stand ready to carry out his decisions, and to pursue and capture by invisible and mysterious

processes those whom he has condemned as guilty. The faces of these figures are distorted by passion, and their attitudes are such as men might be conceived to assume in apprehending some notorious criminal whom Yam-lo had ordered to be seized.

At the end of this spacious courtyard is the shrine of the god, but he is so hidden behind a yellow curtain that it is impossible to catch a glimpse of his image. In front of him are statues of his two secretaries, who, with huge pens in their hands, stand ready day and night to take down the petitions and indictments laid before the god by those who are in sorrow or who are suffering wrong.

One afternoon the peace of such a temple was suddenly disturbed by a noisy clamour outside, and the sound of hurried footsteps as of a crowd rushing through the main gates. Two men advanced with rapid, excited strides straight past the demon policeman at the door, who seemed to scowl with added ferocity as they gazed at the actors in a scene with which they would have much to do by-and-by.

The two men were quite young, a little over twenty; and behind them followed a string of idlers and loafers and street arabs, who seem to spring up like magic when anything unusual happens. One of the young men was slightly ahead of the crowd. His face was flushed and his black eyes sparkled with excitement, whilst in his left hand he carried a large white cock. He was the complainant, and his purpose in coming to the temple was to appeal to the god to vindicate his honour.

He took his stand in front of the idol, and the

secretaries, with pens in their hands, seemed to put on a strained look of attention as the young fellow produced a roll of paper and began to read the statement he had drawn up. It was diffuse and wordy, as most of such documents are, but the main facts were quite plain.

The two young men were assistants in a shop in the city. Some little time before, the master of the shop, without telling either of them, concealed in a chosen place a sum of one hundred dollars, which he wished to have in readiness in order to pay for certain goods he had purchased. The previous day, when he went to get the money on the presentation of the bill, he found to his horror that it had disappeared. He had told no one of this secret hoard, not even his wife; and therefore he felt convinced that in some way or other one of his two assistants had discovered his hiding-place. For some reason his suspicions became aroused against the man who was now detailing his grievances, and who was appealing to the god to set in motion all the tremendous forces at his command, not only to proclaim his innocence but also to bring condign punishment on the real culprit.

The scene was a weird and fascinating one, and became most exciting as the young man neared the end of his appeal. He called upon the god to hurl all the pains and penalties in his unseen armoury against the man who had really stolen the money.

"Let his life be one long torture," he cried with uplifted hands. "May every enterprise in which he engages end in disaster; may his father and mother

die, and let him be left desolate; may a subtle and incurable disease lay its grip upon him; may misfortune pursue him in every shape and form; may he become a beggar with ulcered legs and sit on the roadside and beseech the passers-by, in sunshine and in storm, for a few cash that will just help to keep him alive; may he never have a son to perpetuate his name or to make offerings to his spirit in the Land of Shadows; may madness seize upon him so that his reason shall fly and he shall be a source of terror to his fellow-men; and finally, may a tragic and horrible death bring his life to a sudden end, even as I bring to an end the life of this white cock that I have brought with me."

As he uttered these last words he grasped a chopper, and with one sharp and vicious blow cut off the head of the struggling animal, which wildly fluttered its wings in the agonies of death, whilst its life-blood poured out in a stream on the ground.

He then took his petition, and advancing close up to the secretaries, who seemed for the moment to gaze down upon him with a look of sympathy on their faces, he set fire to it and burned it to ashes. In this way it passed into the hands of the god, who would speedily set in motion unseen machinery to bring down upon the head of the guilty one the judgments which had just been invoked.

The sympathies of the crowd were with the man who had sworn a solemn oath that he was innocent of the theft. The other young fellow, who had said little or nothing during the proceedings, was believed to be the real culprit, but there was no evidence

upon which he could be convicted. The god knew, however, and every one was satisfied that in due time punishment would descend upon the transgressor.

In a few minutes the temple resumed its normal aspect, for with the disappearance of the two principal actors in the scene, the idlers from the street slowly dispersed, each one loudly expressing his opinion as to the merits of the question in dispute. With the dissolving of the crowd, it would have seemed to the casual observer that no further proceedings were to be taken in the matter. The god's face wore its usually placid look, unmoved by the shifting panorama of human life which ebbed and flowed in front of him from morning till night. The ghastly-looking policemen, with their grinning visages and ferocious scowls and contorted bodies, remained in the same unchanging postures by the main entrance.

A week or two had gone by since the appeal had been made to the god, when those who were following the case and were looking out for some grim evidence that the god was at work in bringing retribution on the man whom everyone suspected of being the thief, were startled by a heartrending catastrophe.

This man had a sister, just bursting into womanhood, who was the very light of her home. Her merry laugh could be heard throughout the day, so that sadness could not long abide in the same house. Her face, too, seemed to have been formed to match her sunny smiles, and was a constant inspiration that never failed to give those who looked upon it a brighter view of life.

One morning she went down to the river-bank with several of her neighbours to do the household washing. The stream was strong and rapid in the centre, but the place which these women had selected for their work had always been considered perfectly safe, for it was outside the current and no accident had ever happened there.

They had finished all that they had purposed to do, and were ascending the bank to return home, when they heard an agonized cry and turning swiftly round they perceived that this young girl had stumbled and fallen into the river. They were so horrified at the accident that they lost all presence of mind and allowed the fast-flowing stream to get a grip of her and drag her into the current. When help at last came, her body could just be seen floating on the troubled waters, and before a boat could be launched it had disappeared in the waves of the sea which tumbled and roared about a quarter of a mile further down.

This terrible disaster, which brought unutterable gloom and sorrow upon the home, was unquestionably the work of the god. With bated breath people talked of the tragic end of this beautiful girl, who had won her way into the hearts of all who knew her; but they recognized that her death had been caused by no mere accident, but by the mysterious power of the invisible forces which are always at work to bring punishment upon those who have violated the Righteousness of Heaven.

About a month after this calamity, the monsoon rains began to fall. The clouds gathered in dense

masses upon the neighbouring hills, and poured down such copious showers that the mountain streams were turned into roaring avalanches, tearing their way down to the sea with an impetuosity that nothing could resist.

One of these streams, which used to run by the side of the ancestral property of the family of the man who was believed to have stolen the hundred dollars, overflowed its banks and rushing along with mad and headlong speed it swept away their fields, so that when the rains ceased not a trace of them was to be found, but only sand and gravel, from which no crop could ever be gathered in the future. The consequence was that the family was utterly ruined.

This second disaster falling on the homestead was a clear indication to everyone who knew the story of the stolen money that the god was still at work in bringing retribution on the sinner. The fact that other farms had come out of the flood undamaged was proof positive of this.

From this time, too, the young man who really was the culprit began to be troubled in his mind because of the calamities that had fallen on his family. The death of his sister by drowning, and the utter destruction of his home by the flood, which had injured no other farmer in the neighbourhood, were plain indications that the curses which his falsely accused fellow-assistant had prayed the god to bring down on the head of the guilty party were indeed coming fast and thick upon him.

A dread of coming evil took possession of him, and this so preyed upon his mind that he began to

lose his reason. He would go about muttering to himself, and declaring that he saw devils. These fits grew upon him, until at last he became raving mad, and had to be seized and bound with ropes to prevent him doing injury to himself or to others. At times he suffered from violent spasms of mania, while at others, again, though undoubtedly insane, he was quiet and subdued. He would then talk incessantly to himself, and bemoan the sad fact that the dread God of the City was sending evil spirits to torment him because he had purloined the hundred dollars belonging to his master.

By-and-by these random confessions attracted the attention of his heart-broken father, who used to sit watching by his side, and they became so frequent and so circumstantial, describing even where the money had been hidden, that at last he determined to examine into the matter. Investigations were made, and the whole sum was found in the very place which the young man had mentioned in his delirium, and was at once returned to the shopkeeper.

As the money had been given back, and the father and mother were dependent upon their only son to provide for them in their old age, the man who had entered the accusation before the god was entreated again to appear before him in his temple and withdraw the charges that he had previously made against his fellow-assistant. Only in this formal and legal way could the god have official knowledge of the fact that reparation had been made for the offence which had been committed; and if this were not done he would still continue to send sorrow after

sorrow until the whole family were involved in absolute ruin or death.

Out of pity for the old couple the other young man consented to take the necessary steps. He accordingly presented a petition to the god, stating that he wished to withdraw the accusation which he had made against a certain man who had been suspected of theft. The stolen money had been returned to its owner, and the god was now besought to stay all further proceedings and forgive the culprit for the wrong he had done.

It was evident that this petition was granted, for at once the young man began to recover, and soon all signs of madness left him. He had, however, learned a lesson which he never forgot; and as long as he lived he never committed another offence such as the theft which had brought such serious consequences upon himself and his family.

IX

THE TRAGEDY OF THE YIN FAMILY

IN a certain district in one of the central provinces of China, there lived a man of the name of Yin. He was possessed of considerable property, with a great ambition to become distinguished in life. The one desire of his heart, which seemed to master every other, was that his family should become an aristocratic one.

So far as he knew, none of his immediate predecessors had ever been a conspicuous scholar, or had gained any honour in the great triennial examinations. The result was that his family was a plebeian one, from which no mandarin had ever sprung. In what way, then, could he secure that the fame and dignities, which had come to some of the clans in the region in which he lived, should descend upon his home and upon his grandsons?

He was a rich man, it is true, but he was entirely illiterate, and all his money had been made in trade. As a lad his education had been neglected, for his early life had been spent in the mere struggle for existence. He had been more than successful, but

the honours of the student never could be his, and never could he act as one of the officials of the Empire. It occurred to him, however, that though it was impossible that he himself should ever be classed amongst the great scholars of China, his sons and grandsons might be so honoured. In that case the glory of their success would be reflected upon him, and men would talk of him as the head of a family which had become distinguished for scholarship and high dignities in the State.

He finally came to the conclusion that the most effectual way of accomplishing this was to secure a lucky burying-ground in which he could lay the bodies of his father and his grandfather, who had departed this life some years before. The universal belief that in some mysterious way the dead have the power of showering down wealth and honours and prosperity upon the surviving members of their families, was held most tenaciously by Mr. Yin. This belief pointed out to him how he could emerge from the common and dreary road along which his ancestors had travelled, into the one where royal favours and official distinction would mark out his posterity in the future.

As he had retired from business, he was able to spend nearly the whole of his time in searching the country for the spots where certain unseen forces are supposed to collect with such dominant and over-mastering power that the body of any person laid to rest amongst them will be found to dispense untold riches and dignities upon his nearest relatives. Accordingly, attended by a professor of the art,

whose study of this intricate science enable him to detect at a glance the places which fulfilled the required conditions, Yin made frequent excursions in the regions around his home.

The valleys through which the streams ran, and where the sound of the running waters could be heard day and night as they sang their way to the sea, were all explored. Wherever water and hills were to be found in a happy conjunction, there these two men were to be seen peering over the ground, and with the aid of a compass which the professor carried with him in a cloth bag, marking whether the lines upon which they ran indicated that the mysterious Dragon had his residence beneath.

Innumerable places were carefully examined, and whilst some of them would have been admirably suited for a person of ordinary ambition, they did not satisfy the large expectations for the future which were cherished by Mr. Yin. The rising knolls and winding streams and far-off views of hills lying in the mist-like distance, showed perhaps that moderate prosperity would be the lot of those whose kindred might be buried there; but there were no signs of preeminence in scholarship, or of mandarins riding on horseback or in sedan-chairs, with great retinues attending them, as they proceeded in haughty dignity through the streets of the city in which they lived as rulers. Such places were therefore rejected as unsuitable.

Days and months went by in this search for a spot with which the fortunes of the Yin family were to be linked for many generations yet to come; but

every place failed in some one or two particulars which would have marred the splendid prospect that ambition had pictured before the vision of this wealthy man.

At last, as they were sauntering along one day with eyes keen and alert, they stayed for a moment to rest on the top of a low hill which they had just ascended. Hardly had they cast a rapid glance over the beautiful scenery that lay stretched out before them, before the professor, with flashing eyes and unusual enthusiasm, exclaimed with excitement in his voice, "See! this is the very place we have been looking for all these days!

"No more suitable spot could have been found in the whole of China than this. We stand, as it were, in the centre of a great amphitheatre in which have been gathered the finest forces of Fung-Shuy. Behind us the hill rises in a graceful semi-circular form to shield the spot, where the dead shall lie buried, from the northern blasts, and from the fierce and malignant spirits that come flying on the wings of the great gales which blow with the touch of the ice and snow in them.

"On the plain in front of us, scattered over its surface, are gentle risings showing where the Dragon lies reposing, waiting to dispense its favours to all who come within its magic influence. And then, behold how the river winds in and out, seemingly unwilling to leave a place where unseen influences are at work to enrich the homes and gladden the hearts of the men and women of this region. See how it flows out with a hasty rush towards the sea

beyond, and how it threads its way round yonder cape and is lost to view. Then mark again how it would seem as though some force it could not control had swung it round in its course, for it winds back upon the plain with gleaming eyes and joyous looks as if it were glad to return once more towards the distant mountains from whence it took its rise.

"The meaning of all this is," he continued, "that the prosperity, which the Dragon will bestow upon the living through the ministry of the dead lying within its domain, shall not soon pass away, but like the river that we see meandering before us, shall stay and comfort for many a long year those to whom it has been granted.

"That riches will come is certain, and official rank, and honours as well; for cast your eyes upon yonder ridge gleaming in the morning sun, and note the figure which rises up distinct and well-defined from its summit. It is simply a rock, it is true, but mark well its contour and you will note how the outline grows upon your vision until it assumes the form of a mandarin in full official robes standing with his face towards us.

"I would strongly advise you," concluded the professor, "to secure this plot of land on which we stand, whatever it may cost you, for every ambition that has ever filled your soul shall in time be satisfied by the wealth and honours which not only the Dragon but all his attendant spirits shall combine to pour into your home."

Yin was entranced with the prospect which was pictured before him in such glowing language by the

man at his side, and he heartily agreed with the proposal that he should stay his search and purchase the ground on which they were standing as a cemetery for his family.

Just at this moment a man came sauntering along to see what these two strangers were doing in this out-of-the-way place, to which no road ran and from which no by-paths led to the villages beyond.

"Can you tell me, my man," asked Yin, "to whom this piece of land belongs?"

"Yes, I can easily do that," he replied. "Do you see that dilapidated-looking cottage down by the river-side? Well, it is occupied by a man named Lin, together with his wife and a daughter about nineteen years of age. They are exceedingly poor, as you can see by their house. The only property Lin possesses is this plot of ground, which has come down to him from his forefathers, and which he hopes one day to dispose of to some well-to-do person as a burying-ground that may bring him good luck."

"I am very willing to buy the land, if I can only get it at a reasonable price," replied Yin, "and I shall be glad if you will consent to act as middle-man and negotiate the matter for me. You might go at once and see Lin, and find out what are the terms upon which he is willing to transfer the property to me."

On the morrow the middle-man returned and reported to Yin that Lin would on no consideration consent to let him have the ground. "The fact is," he continued, "that Lin has a settled purpose in his mind with which this particular plot of land has a good deal

to do. He and his wife are getting on in years, and when the daughter is married off he is afraid that his branch of the family will become extinct; so he plans to get a husband for her who will come into the home and act the part of a son as well as that of son-in-law."

So determined, however, was Yin to gain possession of this particular piece of land that after considerable negotiations during which it seemed as though the old father would never be moved from his settled purpose, it was finally agreed that his daughter should be married to Yin's eldest son, Shung, and that her father and mother should remove to rooms in Yin's family mansion, where they should be maintained by him in ease and comfort as long as they lived. Had Yin been a large-hearted and generous person, this plan would have been an ideal one, but seeing that he was by nature a stingy, money-grubbing individual, it was attended with the most tragic results.

No sooner had the deeds of the coveted plot of ground been passed over to him than Yin had the body of his father, who had been buried in a place far removed from the influence of the Dragon, transferred to this new location, where he would be in touch with the higher spirits of the Underworld. Here, also, he could catch the eye of the mandarin, who day and night would have his face turned towards him, and who from the very fact of the sympathy that would grow up between them, must in time give him the mysterious power of turning his grandsons, and their sons after them, into scholars,

who would obtain high positions in the service of the State.

In the meanwhile preparations were being made for the marriage of the young maiden of low degree to a man in a much higher social position than she could ever have aspired to in the ordinary course of events. Pearl was a sweet, comely-looking damsel, who would have made a model wife to one of her own station in life, but who was utterly unsuited for the new dignity which would be thrust upon her as soon as she crossed the threshold of the wealthy family of Yin. She was simply a peasant girl, without education and without refinement. Her days had been passed amidst scenes of poverty, and though she was a thoroughly good girl, with the high ideals that the commonest people in China everywhere have, her proper position was after all amongst the kind of people with whom she had lived all her life.

Her father and mother had indeed all along been doubtful about the propriety of marrying their daughter into a family so much above them as the Yins, and for a long time they had stood out against all the arguments in favour of it Finally, overborne by the impetuosity of Yin, and dazzled with the prospects which such an alliance offered not only to the girl herself but also to themselves by the agreement to keep them in comfort for the rest of their lives, they had given an unwilling consent.

In order that Pearl should suffer as little disgrace as possible when she appeared amongst her new relations, her father sold all his available belongings in order to procure suitable wedding-garments for

her. His idea, however, of the fitness of things had been gathered from the humble surroundings in which he had lived all his days, and the silks and satins and expensive jewellery that adorn the brides of the wealthy had never come within the vision of his dreams. Still Pearl was a pretty girl, and with her piercing black eyes which always seemed to be suffused with laughter, and with a smile which looked like a flash from a summer sky, she needed but little adornment, and would have won the heart of any man who had the soul to appreciate a true woman when he saw one.

At last the day came, hurried on by the eager desire of Yin to have the whole thing settled, when the humble home was to be given up and its inmates transferred to the rich house that lay just over a neighbouring hill.

A magnificent bridal chair, whose brilliant crimson colour made it a conspicuous object on the grey landscape, wound its way towards the cottage where the bride was attired all ready to step into it the moment it appeared at the door.

In front of it there marched a band, making the country-side resound with weird notes which seemed to fly on the air with defiance in their tones, and to send their echoes mounting to the tops of the hills and piercing down into the silent valleys. There were also crowds of retainers and dependants of the wealthy man. These were dressed in semi-official robes, and flocked along with smiling faces and joyous shouts. The occasion was a festal one, and visions of rare dishes and of generous feasting, kept

up for several days, filled the minds of the happy procession as it went to meet the bride.

The return of the party was still more boisterous in its merriment. The members of the band seemed inspired by the occasion and sent forth lusty strains, whilst the instruments, as if aware how much depended upon them, responded to the efforts of the performers and filled the air with joyful notes.

A distinguished company had assembled to receive the bride, as she was led by her husband from the crimson chair and advanced with timid steps and faltering heart into the room that had been prepared for her reception. As she entered the house something in the air struck a chill into her heart and caused the hopes of happiness, which she had been cherishing, to die an almost instant death.

Shung, her husband, was a man of ignoble mind, and had always objected to marrying a woman so far beneath him. The sight of his bride, with her rustic air, and the ill-made commonplace-looking clothes in which she was dressed, made his face burn with shame, for he knew that a sneer was lurking on the face of everyone who had gathered to have a look at her.

A profound feeling of hatred entered his narrow soul, and as the days went by the one purpose of his life was to humiliate this sweet-tempered woman, who had been sacrificed simply to further the ambitious schemes of her designing father-in-law, Mr. Yin. For a few weeks he simply ignored her, but by degrees he treated her so cruelly that many a time she had serious thoughts of putting an end to

her life. It soon turned out that a systematic attempt was being made by both father and son to get rid of the whole family.

The old father and mother, whom Yin had agreed to provide for during the rest of their lives, found things so intolerable that they voluntarily left the miserable quarters assigned to them and returned to their empty cottage. Every stick of furniture had been sold in order to buy their daughter's wedding garments, so that when they reached their old home they found absolutely nothing in it. With a few bundles of straw they made up a bed on the floor, but there was no food to eat, and not a single thing to comfort them in this their hour of darkest misery.

Sorrow for their daughter, and disappointment and anguish of heart at the thought of how they had been tricked and cheated by Mr. Yin in order that he might gain possession of their bit of land, so told upon their spirits that they both fell ill of a low fever, which laid them prostrate on their bed of straw. As they lived remote from other people, for some time no one knew that they were sick. Days went by without anyone visiting them, and when at last one kindly-hearted farmer came to make enquiries, he found to his horror that both husband and wife lay dead, side by side, in their miserable cabin

The news of their death produced the greatest pleasure in the mind of the wretched man who was really the cause of it. He was now freed from the compact compelling him to provide for them during their life, and so there would be an actual saving of the money which he would have had to spend in

providing them with food and clothing. A cruel, wintry smile lingered on his hard face for several days after the poor old couple had been lain to rest on the hillside near their cottage, and this was the only look of mourning his features ever assumed.

From this time Pearl's life became more and more of a burden to her. Love, the one element which would have filled her heart with happiness, was the one thing that was never offered her. Instead of affection there were cruel, cutting words and scornful looks and heavy blows—all these were plentifully bestowed upon her by the soulless man who was called her husband.

At length, to show his utter contempt and abhorrence of her, he arranged with the connivance of his father to bring a concubine into his home. This lady came from a comparatively good family, and was induced to take this secondary position because of the large sum of money that was paid to her father for her. The misery of Pearl was only intensified by her appearance on the scene. Following the lead of her husband, and jealous of the higher position in the family that the law gave her rival, she took every means that a spiteful woman could devise to make her life still more miserable.

The death of her parents had filled Pearl's heart with such intense grief and sorrow that life had lost all its charm for her. She saw, moreover, from the sordid rejoicing that was openly made at their tragic end, that the Yins would never be satisfied until she too had followed them into the Land of Shadows. She would therefore anticipate the cruel purposes of her

husband and his father, and so deliver herself from a persecution that would only cease with her death. So one midnight, when all the rest of the family were asleep, and nothing was heard outside but the moaning of the wind which seemed as though it was preparing to sing a requiem over her, she put an end to all her earthly troubles by hanging herself in her own room.

When the body was found next day, suspended from a hook in one of the beams, a great cry of delight was uttered by Yin and his son. Without any violence on their part they had been set free from their alliance with this low-class family, and at a very small cost they had obtained firm possession of the land which was to enrich and ennoble their descendants.

And so whilst the poor girl lay dead, driven to an untimely end by spirits more fierce and malignant than any that were supposed to be flying with hatred in their hearts in the air around, smiles and laughter and noisy congratulations were indulged in by the living ghouls whose persecution had made this sweet-tempered woman's life unbearable.

But retribution was at hand. Heaven moves slowly in the punishment of the wicked, but its footsteps are sure and they travel irresistibly along the road that leads to vengeance on the wrongdoer.

One dark night, when the sky was overcast and neither moon nor stars were to be seen, and a storm of unusual violence was filling the air with a tumult of fierce and angry moanings, a weird and gruesome scene was enacted at the grave where the father of Yin had been buried. Hideous sounds of wailing

and shrieking could be heard, as though all the demons of the infernal regions had assembled there to hold a night of carnival. Louder than the storm, the cries penetrated through the shrillest blasts, and people in their homes far away were wakened out of their sleep by the unearthly yells which froze their blood with terror. At last a thunderbolt rolled from the darkened heavens, louder than ever mortal man had heard. The lightnings flashed, and concentrating all their force upon the grave just where the coffin lay, they tore up a huge chasm in the earth, and gripping the coffin within their fiery fingers, they tossed it with disdain upon a hillside a mile away.

After a long search, Yin discovered it next day in the lonely spot where it had been cast, and was returning to make arrangements for its interment, when in a lonely part of the road two unearthly figures suddenly rose up before him. These, to his horror, he recognized as the spirits of Pearl's father and mother who had practically been done to death by him, and whom Yam-lo had allowed to revisit the earth in order to plague the man who was the author of their destruction. So terrified was Yin at their wild and threatening aspect, that he fell to the ground in a swoon, and thus he was found, hours afterwards, by his son, who had come out in search of him.

For several days he was tended with the greatest care, and the most famous physicians were called in to prescribe for him. He never rallied, however, and there was always a vague and haunted look in his eyes, as though he saw some terrible vision which

frightened away his reasoning powers and prevented him from regaining consciousness. In this condition he died, without a look of recognition for those he loved, and without a word of explanation as to the cause of this tragic conclusion of a life that was still in its prime.

The eldest son was now master of his father's wealth; but instead of learning a lesson from the terrible judgment which had fallen on his home because of the injustice and wrong that had been committed on an innocent family, he only became more hard-hearted in his treatment of those who were within his power. He never dreamed of making any reparation for the acts of cruelty by which he had driven his wife to hang herself in order to escape his tyranny. But the steps of Fate were still moving on towards him. Leaden-footed they might be and slow, but with unerring certainty they were travelling steadily on to carry out the vengeance of the gods.

By-and-by the room in which Pearl had died became haunted. Her spectral figure could be seen in the gloaming, flitting about and peering out of the door with a look of agony on her face. Sometimes she would be seen in the early dawn, restless and agitated, as though she had been wandering up and down the whole night; and again she would flit about in the moonlight and creep into the shadow of the houses, but always with a ghost of the old look that had made her face so winning and so charming when she was alive.

When it was realized that it was her spirit which

was haunting the house, the greatest alarm and terror were evinced by every one in it. There is nothing more terrible than the appearance of the spirits of those who have been wronged, for they always come with some vengeful purpose. No matter how loving, the persons themselves may have been in life, with death their whole nature changes and they are filled with the most passionate desire to inflict injury and especially death upon the object of their hatred.

The course of ill-usage which her husband Shung had cruelly adopted in order to drive Pearl to commit suicide was known to every one, and that she should now appear to wreak vengeance on him was not considered at all wonderful; but still every one was mortally afraid lest they should become involved in the punishment that was sure to be meted out.

As the ghost continued to linger about and showed no signs of disappearing, Shung was at last seized with apprehension lest some calamity was about to fall upon his house. In order to protect himself from any unexpected attack from the spirit that wandered and fluttered about in the darkest and most retired rooms in his home, he provided himself with a sword which he had ground down to a very sharp edge and which he carried in his hand ready uplifted to lunge at Pearl should she dare to attack him.

One evening, unaware that his concubine was sitting in a certain room on which the shadows had thickly fallen, he was entering it for some purpose, when the spirit of his late wife gripped his hand with an overmastering force which he felt himself

unable to resist, and forced him to strike repeated blows against the poor defenceless woman. Not more than a dozen of these had been given before she was lying senseless on the ground, breathing out her life from the gaping wounds through which her life-blood was flowing in streams.

When the grip of the ghost had relaxed its hold upon him and he felt himself free to look at what he had done, Shung was horrified beyond measure as he gazed with staring eyes upon the dreadful sight before him, and realized the judgment that had come upon him for the wrongs he had done to Pearl and her family.

As soon as the news of the murder of the woman was carried to her father, he entered a complaint before the nearest mandarin, who issued a warrant for Shung's apprehension. At his trial he attempted to defend himself by declaring that it was not he who had killed his concubine, but an evil spirit which had caught hold of his arm and had directed the blows that had caused her death.

The magistrate smiled at this extraordinary defence, and said that Shung must consider him a great fool if he thought for a moment that he would be willing to accept such a ridiculous excuse for the dreadful crime he had committed.

As Shung was a wealthy man and had the means of bribing the under-officials in the yamen, his case was remanded in order to see how much money could be squeezed out of him before the final sentence was given. The murder—apparently without reason or provocation—of a woman who had

been a member of a prominent family in society, produced a widespread feeling of indignation, and public opinion was strong in condemnation of Shung. Every one felt that there ought to be exemplary punishment in his case; otherwise any man who had only money enough might be able to defy all the great principles established by Heaven for the government of society and for the prevention of crime.

In order to make it easy for Shung whilst he was in prison, his mother had to spend large sums in bribing every one connected with the yamen. Never before had such an opportunity for reaping a golden harvest been presented to the avaricious minions entrusted by the Emperor with the administration of justice amongst his subjects. In her anxiety for her son the poor woman sold field after field to find funds wherewith to meet the demands of these greedy officials. Dark hints had simply to be thrown out by some of these that Shung was in danger of his life, and fresh sales would be made to bribe the mandarin to be lenient in his judgment of him.

At length the property had all been disposed of, and when it was known that no further money could be obtained, sentence was given that Shung should be imprisoned for life. This was a cruel blow to his mother, who had all along hoped that he might be released. Full of sorrow and absolutely penniless in a few weeks she died of a broken heart, whilst the son, seeing nothing but a hopeless imprisonment before him, committed suicide and thus ended his worthless life.

This tragic extinction of a family, which only a short year before was in the highest state of prosperity, was accepted by every one who heard the story as a just and righteous punishment from Heaven. For Heaven is so careful of human life that any one who destroys it comes under the inevitable law that he too shall in his turn be crushed under the wheels of avenging justice.

X

SAM-CHUNG AND THE WATER DEMON

SAM-CHUNG was one of the most famous men in the history of the Buddhist Church, and had distinguished himself by the earnestness and self-denial with which he had entered on the pursuit of eternal life. His mind had been greatly exercised and distressed at the pains and sorrows which mankind were apparently doomed to endure. Even those, however, terrible as they were, he could have managed to tolerate had they not ended, in the case of every human being, in the crowning calamity which comes upon all at the close of life.

Death was the great mystery which cast its shadow on every human being. It invaded every home. The sage whose virtues and teachings were the means of uplifting countless generations of men came under its great law. Men of infamous and abandoned character seemed often to outlive the more virtuous of their fellow-beings; but they too, when the gods saw fit, were hurried off without any ceremony. Even the little ones, who had never violated any of the laws of Heaven, came under this

universal scourge ; and many of them, who had only just commenced to live were driven out into the Land of Shadows by this mysterious force which dominates all human life.

Accordingly Sam-Chung wanted to be freed from the power of death, so that its shadow should never darken his life in the years to come.

After careful enquiry, and through friendly hints from men who, he had reason to believe, were fairies in disguise and had been sent by the Goddess of Mercy to help those who aspired after a higher life, he learned that it was possible by the constant pursuit of virtue to arrive at that stage of existence in which death would lose all its power to injure, and men should become immortal. This boon of eternal life could be won by every man or woman who was willing to pay the price for so precious a gift. It could be gained by great self-denial, by willingness to suffer, and especially by the exhibition of profound love and sympathy for those who were in sorrow of any kind. It appeared, indeed, that the one thing most imperatively demanded by the gods from those who aspired to enter their ranks was that they should be possessed of a divine compassion, and that their supreme object should be the succouring of distressed humanity. Without this compassion any personal sacrifice that might be made in the search for immortality would be absolutely useless.

Sam-Chung was already conscious that he was a favourite of the gods, for they had given him two companions, both with supernatural powers, to

enable him to contend against the cunning schemes of the evil spirits, who are ever planning how to thwart and destroy those whose hearts are set upon higher things.

One day, accompanied by Chiau and Chu, the two attendants commissioned by the Goddess of Mercy to attend upon him, Sam-Chung started on his long journey for the famous Tien-ho river, to cross which is the ambition of every pilgrim on his way to the land of the Immortals. They endured many weeks of painful travelling over high mountains and through deep valleys which lay in constant shadow, and across sandy deserts where men perished of thirst or were struck down by the scorching heat of the sun, before they met any of the infernal foes that they expected to be lying in wait for them.

Weary and footsore, they at last arrived one evening on the shores of the mighty Tien-ho, just as the sun was setting. The glory of the clouds in the west streamed on to the waters of the river, and made them sparkle with a beauty which seemed to our wearied travellers to transform them into something more than earthly. The river here was so wide that it looked like an inland sea. There was no sign of land on the distant horizon, nothing but one interminable vista of waters, stretching away as far as the eye could reach.

One thing, however, greatly disappointed Sam-Chung and his companions, and that was the absence of boats. They had planned to engage one, and by travelling across the river during the night, they

hoped to hurry on their way and at the same time to rest and refresh themselves after the fatigues they had been compelled to endure on their long land journey.

It now became a very serious question with them where they were to spend the night. There was no sign of any human habitation round about. There was the sandy beach along which they were walking, and there was the wide expanse of the river, on which the evening mists were slowly gathering; but no appearance of life. Just as they were wondering what course they should pursue, the faint sound of some musical instruments came floating on the air and caught their ear. Hastening forward in the direction from which the music came, they ascended a piece of rising ground, from the top of which they were delighted to see a village nestling on the hill-side, and a small temple standing on the very margin of the river.

With hearts overjoyed at the prospect of gaining some place where they could lodge for the night, they hurried forward to the hamlet in front of them. As they drew nearer, the sounds of music became louder and more distinct. They concluded that some festival was being observed, or that some happy gathering amongst the people had thrown them all into a holiday mood. Entering the village, they made their way to a house which stood out prominently from the rest, and which was better built than any others they could see. Besides, it was the one from which the music issued, and around its doors was gathered a number of people who had evidently been attending some feast inside.

As the three travellers came up to the door, a venerable-looking old man came out to meet them. Seeing that they were strangers, he courteously invited them to enter; and on Sam-Chung asking whether they could be entertained for the night, he assured them that there was ample room for them in the house, and that he gladly welcomed them to be his guests for as long as it was their pleasure to remain.

"In the meanwhile you must come in," he said, "and have some food, for you must be tired and hungry after travelling so far, and the tables are still covered with the good things which were prepared for the feast to-day."

After they had finished their meal, they began to talk to the old gentleman who was so kindly entertaining them. They were greatly pleased with his courtesy and with the hearty hospitality which he had pressed upon them. They noticed, however, that he was very absent-minded, and looked as if some unpleasant thought lay heavy on his heart.

"May I ask," said Sam-Chung, "what was the reason for the great gathering here to-day? There is no festival in the Chinese calendar falling on this date, so I thought I would take the liberty of enquiring what occasion you were really commemorating."

"We were not commemorating anything," the old man replied with a grave face. "It was really a funeral service for two of my grand-children, who, though they are not yet dead, will certainly disappear out of this life before many hours have passed."

"But how can such a ceremony be performed over persons who are still alive?" asked Sam-Chung with a look of wonder in his face.

"When I have explained the circumstances to you, you will then be no longer surprised at this unusual service," replied the old man.

"You must know," he continued, "that this region is under the control of a Demon of a most cruel and bloodthirsty disposition. He is not like the ordinary spirits, whose images are enshrined in our temples, and whose main aim is to protect and guard their worshippers. This one has no love for mankind, but on the contrary the bitterest hatred, and his whole life seems to be occupied in scheming how he may inflict sorrow and disaster on them. His greatest cruelty is to insist that every year just about this time two children, one a boy and the other a girl, shall be conveyed to his temple by the river side to be devoured by him. Many attempts have been made to resist this barbarous demand, but they have only resulted in increased suffering to those who have dared to oppose him. The consequence is that the people submit to this cruel murder of their children, though many a heart is broken at the loss of those dearest to them."

"But is there any system by which the unfortunate people may get to know when this terrible sacrifice is going to be demanded from them?" asked Sam-Chung.

"Oh yes," replied the man. "The families are taken in rotation, and when each one's turn comes round, their children are prepared for the sacrifice.

Moreover, that there may be no mistake, the Demon himself appears in the home a few days before, and gives a threatening command to have the victims ready on such a date. Only the day before yesterday, this summons came to us to have our children ready by to-morrow morning at break of day. That is why we had a feast to-day, and performed the funeral rites for the dead, so that their spirits may not be held under the control of this merciless Demon, but may in time be permitted to issue from the Land of Shadows, and be born again under happier circumstances into this world, which they are leaving under such tragic circumstances."

"But what is the Demon like?" enquired Sam-Chung.

"Oh, no one can ever tell what he is like," said the man. "He has no bodily form that one can look upon. His presence is known by a strong blast of wind which fills the place with a peculiar odour, and with an influence so subtle that you feel yourself within the grip of a powerful force, and instinctively bow your head as though you were in the presence of a being who could destroy you in a moment were he so disposed."

"One more question and I have finished," said Sam-Chung. "Where did this Demon come from, and how is it that he has acquired such an over-mastering supremacy over the lives of men, that he seems able to defy even Heaven itself, and all the great hosts of kindly gods who are working for the salvation of mankind?"

"This Demon," the man replied, "was once an

inhabitant of the Western Heaven, and under the direct control of the Goddess of Mercy. He must, however, have been filled with evil devices and fiendish instincts from the very beginning, for he seized the first opportunity to escape to earth, and to take up his residence in the grottoes and caverns that lie deep down beneath the waters of the Tien-ho. Other spirits almost as bad as himself have also taken up their abode there, and they combine their forces to bring calamity and disaster upon the people of this region."

Sam-Chung, whose heart was filled with the tenderest feelings of compassion for all living things, so much so that his name was a familiar one even amongst the Immortals in the far-off Western Heaven, felt himself stirred by a mighty indignation when he thought of how innocent childhood had been sacrificed to minister to the unnatural passion of this depraved Demon. Chiau and Chu were as profoundly indignant as he, and a serious consultation ensued as to the best methods to be adopted to save the little ones who were doomed to destruction on the morrow, and at the same time to break the monster's rule so that it should cease for ever.

Chiau, who was the more daring of the two whom the goddess had deputed to protect Sam-Chung, at length cried out with flashing eyes, "I will personate the boy, Chu shall act the girl, and together we will fight the Demon and overthrow and kill him, and so deliver the people from his dreadful tyranny."

Turning to the old man, he said, "Bring the children here so that we may see them, and make

our plans so perfect that the Demon with all his cunning will not be able to detect or frustrate them."

In a few moments the little ones were led in by their grandfather. The boy was seven and the girl was one year older. They were both of them nervous and shy, and clung timidly to the old man as if for protection.

They were very interesting-looking children. The boy was a proud, brave-spirited little fellow, as one could see by the poise of his head as he gazed at the strangers. If anything could be predicted from his looks, he would one day turn out to be a man of great power, for he had in his youthful face all the signs which promise a life out of the common. The girl was a shy little thing, with her hair done up in a childlike fashion that well became her. She was a dainty little mortal. Her eyes were almond-shaped, and with the coyness of her sex she kept shooting out glances from the corners of them at the three men who were looking at her. Her cheeks were pale, with just a suspicion of colour painted into them by the deft hand of nature; whilst her lips had been touched with the faintest dash of carmine, evidently just a moment ago, before she left her mother's side.

"Now, my boy," said Chiau to the little fellow, "keep your eyes fixed on me, and never take them from me for a moment; and you, little sister," addressing the girl, "do the same to the man next to me, and you will see something that will make you both laugh."

The eyes of them both were at once riveted on the

two men, and a look of amazement slowly crept into their faces. And no wonder, for as they gazed they saw the two men rapidly changing, and becoming smaller and smaller, until they were the exact size and image of themselves. In their features and dress, and in every minute detail they were the precise pattern of the children, who with staring eyes were held spellbound by the magic change which had taken place in front of them.

"Now," said Chiau to the old gentleman, "the transformation is complete. Take the children away and hide them in the remotest and most inaccessible room that you have in your house. Let them be seen by no chattering woman or servant who might divulge our secret, so that in some way or other it might reach the ears of the Demon, and put him on his guard. Remember that from this moment these little ones are not supposed to exist, but that we are your grand-children who are to be taken to the temple to-morrow morning at break of day."

Just as the eastern sky showed the first touch of colour, two sedan-chairs were brought up to the door to carry the two victims away to be devoured by the Demon. A few frightened-looking neighbours peered through the gloom to catch a last glimpse of the children, but not one of them had the least suspicion that the boy and girl were really fairies who were about to wage a deadly battle with the Demon in order to deliver them from the curse under which they lived.

No sooner had the children been put into the temple, where a dim rush-light did but serve to

disclose the gloom, and the doors had been closed with a bang, than the chair-bearers rushed away in fear for their very lives

An instant afterwards a hideous, gigantic form emerged from an inner room and advanced towards the children. The Demon was surprised, however, to find that on this occasion the little victims did not exhibit any signs of alarm, as had always been the case hitherto, but seemed to be calmly awaiting his approach. There was no symptom of fear about them, and not a cry of terror broke from their lips; but with a fearless and composed mien they gazed upon him as he advanced.

Hesitating for a moment, as if to measure the foe which he began to fear might lie concealed beneath the figures of the boy and girl before him, the Demon's great fiery eyes began to flash with deadly passion as he saw the two little ones gradually expand in size, until they were transformed into beings as powerful and as mighty as himself. He knew at once that he had been outwitted, and that he must now battle for his very life; so, drawing a sword which had always stood him in good stead, he rushed upon the two who faced him so calmly and with such apparent confidence in themselves.

Chiau and Chu were all ready for the fray, and with weapons firmly gripped and with hearts made strong by the consciousness of the justice of their cause, they awaited the onslaught of the Demon.

And what a battle it was that then ensued in the dim and shadowy temple! It was a conflict of great and deadly significance, waged on one side for the

deliverance of helpless childhood, and on the other for the basest schemes that the spirits of evil could devise. It was a battle royal, in which no quarter was either asked or given. The clash of weapons, and sounds unfamiliar to the human ear, and groans and cries which seemed to come from a lost soul, filled the temple with their hideous uproar.

At last the Demon, who seemed to have been grievously wounded, though by his magic art he had caused his wounds to be instantly healed, began to see that the day was going against him. One more mighty lunge with his broadsword, and one more furious onset, and his craven heart failed him. With a cry of despair he fled from the temple, and plunged headlong into the river flowing by its walls.

Great were the rejoicings when Chiau and Chu returned to report to Sam-Chung the glorious victory they had gained over the Demon. Laughter and rejoicing were heard in every home, and men and women assembled in front of their doors and at the corners of the narrow alley-ways to congratulate each other on the great deliverance which that day had come to them and to their children. The dread of the Demon had already vanished, and a feeling of freedom so inspired the men of the village that as if by a common impulse, they rushed impetuously down to where the temple stood, and in the course of a few hours every vestige of it had disappeared beneath the waters into which the Demon had plunged.

After his great defeat the baffled spirit made his way to the grotto beneath the waters, where he and the other demons had taken up their abode. A

general council was called to devise plans to wipe out the disgrace which had been sustained, and to regain the power that had slipped from the Demon's grasp. They wished also to visit Sam-Chung with condign punishment which would render him helpless for the future.

"We must capture him," said one wicked-looking imp, who always acted as counsellor to the rest. "I have been told that to devour some of his flesh would ensure the prolongation of life for more than a thousand years."

The suggestion to seize Sam-Chung was unanimously accepted as a very inspiration of genius, and the precise measures which were to be adopted in order to capture him were agreed to after a long discussion.

On the very next morning, a most violent snow-storm set in, so that the face of the river and the hills all round about, and the very heavens themselves were lost in the blinding snow-drifts that flew before the gale. Gradually the cold became so intense that the Ice King laid his grip upon the waters of the Tien-ho, and turned the flowing stream into a crystal highway, along which men might travel with ease and safety. Such a sight had never been seen before by any of the people who lived upon its banks, and many were the speculations as to what such a phenomenon might mean to the welfare of the people of the region. It never occurred to any one that this great snow-storm which had turned into ice a river that had never been known to freeze before, was all the work of

demons determined on the destruction of Sam-Chung.

Next day the storm had passed, but the river was one mass of ice which gleamed and glistened in the morning rays. Much to the astonishment of Sam-Chung and his two companions, they caught sight of a number of people, who appeared to be merchants, moving about on the bank of the river, together with several mules laden with merchandise. The whole party seemed intent on their preparations for crossing the river, which they were observed to test in various places to make sure that it was strong enough to bear their weight. This they seemed satisfied about, for in a short time the men and animals set forward on their journey across the ice.

Sam-Chung immediately insisted upon following their example, though the plan was vigorously opposed by the villagers, who predicted all kinds of dangers if he entered on such an uncertain and hazardous enterprise. Being exceedingly anxious to proceed on his journey, however, and seeing no prospect of doing so if he did not take advantage of the present remarkable condition of the river, he hastened to follow in the footsteps of the merchants, who by this time had already advanced some distance on the ice.

He would have been less anxious to enter on this perilous course, had he known that the innocent-looking traders who preceded him were every one of them demons who had changed themselves into the semblance of men in order to lure him to his destruction.

Sam-Chung and his companions had not proceeded more than five or six miles, when ominous symptoms of coming disaster began to manifest themselves. The extreme cold in the air suddenly ceased, and a warm south wind began to blow. The surface of the ice lost its hardness. Streamlets of water trickled here and there, forming great pools which made walking exceedingly difficult.

Chiau, whose mind was a very acute and intelligent one, became terrified at these alarming symptoms of danger, especially as the ice began to crack, and loud and prolonged reports reached them from every direction. Another most suspicious thing was the sudden disappearance of the company of merchants, whom they had all along kept well in sight. There was something wrong, he was fully convinced, and so with all his wits about him, he kept himself alert for any contingency. It was well that he did this, for before they had proceeded another mile, the ice began to grow thinner, and before they could retreat there was a sudden crash and all three were precipitated into the water.

Hardly had Chiau's feet touched the river, than with a superhuman effort he made a spring into the air, and was soon flying with incredible speed in the direction of the Western Heaven, to invoke the aid of the Goddess of Mercy to deliver Sam-Chung from the hands of an enemy who would show him no quarter.

In the meanwhile Sam-Chung and Chu were borne swiftly by the demons, who were eagerly awaiting their immersion in the water, to the great cave that

lay deep down at the bottom of the mighty river. Chu, being an immortal and a special messenger of the Goddess, defied all the arts of the evil spirits to injure him, so that all they could do was to imprison him in one of the inner grottoes and station a guard over him to prevent his escape. Sam-Chung, however, was doomed to death, and the Demon, in revenge for the disgrace he had brought upon him, and in the hope of prolonging his own life by a thousand years, decided that on the morrow he would feast upon his flesh. But he made his plans without taking into consideration the fact that Sam-Chung was an especial favourite with the Goddess.

During the night a tremendous commotion occurred. The waters of the river fled in every direction as before the blast of a hurricane, and the caverns where the demons were assembled were illuminated with a light so brilliant that their eyes became dazzled, and for a time were blinded by the sudden blaze that flashed from every corner. Screaming with terror, they fled in all directions. Only one remained, and that was the fierce spirit who had wrought such sorrow amongst the people of the land near by. He too would have disappeared with the rest, had not some supernatural power chained him to the spot where he stood.

Soon the noble figure of the Goddess of Mercy appeared, accompanied by a splendid train of Fairies who hovered round her to do her bidding. Her first act was to release Sam-Chung, who lay bound ready for his death, which but for her interposition would have taken place within a few hours. He and his

two companions were entrusted to the care of a chosen number of her followers, and conveyed with all speed across the river.

The Goddess then gave a command to some who stood near her person, and in a moment, as if by a flash of lightning, the cowering, terrified Demon had vanished, carried away to be confined in one of the dungeons where persistent haters of mankind are kept imprisoned, until their hearts are changed by some noble sentiment of compassion and the Goddess sees that they are once more fit for liberty.

And then the lights died out, and the sounds of fairy voices ceased. The waters of the river, which had been under a divine spell, returned to their course, and the Goddess with her magnificent train of beneficent spirits departed to her kingdom in the far-off Western Heaven.

XI

THE REWARD OF A BENEVOLENT LIFE

ON the banks of a river flowing through the prefecture of Tingchow, there stood a certain city of about ten thousand inhabitants. Among this mass of people there was a very fair sprinkling of well-to-do men, and perhaps half-a-dozen or so who might have been accounted really wealthy.

Amongst these latter was one particular individual named Chung, who had acquired the reputation of being exceedingly large-hearted and benevolently inclined to all those in distress. Anyone who was in want had but to appeal to Chung, and his immediate necessities would at once be relieved without any tedious investigation into the merits of his case. As may be inferred from this, Chung was an easy-going, good-natured man, who was more inclined to look kindly upon his fellow-men than to criticise them harshly for their follies or their crimes. Such a man has always been popular in this land of China.

Now the whole soul of Chung was centred upon his only son Keng. At the time when our story

opens, this young fellow was growing up to manhood, and had proved himself to be possessed of no mean ability, for on the various occasions on which he had sat for examination before the Literary Chancellor, his papers had been of a very high order of merit.

The rumours of Chung's generosity had travelled further than he had ever dreamed of. Several reports of the noble deeds that he was constantly performing had reached the Immortals in the Western Heaven, and as these are profoundly concerned in the doings of mankind, steps were taken that Chung should not go unrewarded.

One day a fairy in the disguise of a bonze called upon him. He had always had a sincere liking for men of this class. He admired their devotion, and he was moved by their self-sacrifice in giving up home and kindred to spend their lives in the service of the gods and for the good of humanity.

No sooner, therefore, had the priest entered within his doors, than he received him with the greatest politeness and cordiality. The same evening he prepared a great dinner, to which a number of distinguished guests were invited, and a time of high festivity and rejoicing was prolonged into the early hours of the morning.

Next day Chung said to his guest, "I presume you have come round collecting for your temple. I need not assure you that I shall be most delighted to subscribe to anything that has to do with the uplifting of my fellow-men. My donation is ready whenever you wish to accept it."

The bonze, with a smile which lit up the whole of

his countenance, replied that he had not come for the purpose of collecting subscriptions.

"I have come," he said, "to warn you about a far more important matter which affects you and your family. Before very long a great flood will take place in this district, and will sweep everything before it. It will be so sudden that men will not be able to take measures to preserve either their lives or their property—so instantaneous will be the rush of the mighty streams, like ocean floods, from the mountains you can see in the West. My advice to you is to commence at once the construction of boats to carry you and your most precious effects away. When the news first comes that the waters are rising, have them anchored in the creek that flows close by your doors; and when the crisis arrives, delay not a moment, but hurry on board and fly for your lives."

"But when will that be?" asked Chung anxiously.

"I may not tell you the precise day or hour," replied the bonze; "but when the eyes of the stone lions in the East Street of the city shed tears of blood, betake yourselves with all haste to the boats, and leave this doomed place behind you."

"But may I not tell the people of this approaching calamity?" asked Chung, whose tender heart was deeply wrung with distress at the idea of so many being overwhelmed in the coming flood.

"You can please yourself about that," answered the priest, "but no one will believe you. The people of this region are depraved and wicked, and your belief in my words will only cause them to laugh and jeer at you for your credulity."

"But shall I and my family escape with our lives?" finally enquired Chung.

"Yes, you will all escape," was the reply, "and in due time you will return to your home and your future life will be prosperous. But there is one thing," he continued, "about which I must entreat you to be exceedingly careful. As you are being carried down the stream by the great flood, be sure to rescue every living thing that you meet in distress upon the waters. You will not fail to be rewarded for so doing, as the creatures you save will repay you a thousandfold for any services you may render them. There is one thing more that I would solemnly warn you against. You will come across a man floating helplessly on the swiftly flowing tide. Have nothing to do with him. Leave him to his fate. If you try to save him, you will only bring sorrow upon your home."

As the priest was departing, Chung tried to press into his hand a considerable present of money, but he refused to accept it. He did not want money from him, he said. The gods had heard of his great love for men, and they had sent him to warn him so that he might escape the doom which would overtake his fellow-citizens.

After his departure Chung at once called the boat-builders who had their yards along the bank of the stream, and ordered ten large boats to be built with all possible speed. The news of this spread through the town, and when the reasons were asked and the reply was given that the boats were in anticipation of a mighty flood that would ere long

devastate the entire region, everyone screamed with laughter; but Chung let them laugh.

For weeks and months he sent an old man to East Street to see if the eyes of the stone lions there had overflowed with bloody tears.

One day two pig-butchers enquired of this man how it was that every day he appeared and looked into the eyes of the lions. He explained that Chung had sent him, for a prophecy had come from the gods that when the eyes of the lions shed blood, the flood which was to destroy the city would be already madly rushing on its way.

On hearing this, these two butchers determined to play a practical joke. Next day, in readiness for the coming of the old man, they smeared the stone eyes with pigs' blood. No sooner had Chung's messenger caught sight of this than, with terror in his eyes, he fled along the streets to tell his master the dreadful news. By this time everything had been prepared, and Chung was only waiting for the appointed sign. The most valuable of his goods had already been packed in some of the boats, and now his wife and son and household servants all hurried down to the water's edge and embarked; and remembering the injunction of the priest that there should be no delay, Chung at once ordered the anchors to be raised, and the boatmen, as if for dear life, made for the larger stream outside.

Hardly had the vessels begun to move when the sun, which had been blazing in the sky, became clouded over. Soon a terrific storm of wind tore with the force of a hurricane across the land. By-

and-by great drops of rain, the harbingers of the deluge which was to inundate the country, fell in heavy splashes. Ere long it seemed as though the great fountains in the heavens had burst out, for the floods came pouring down in one incessant torrent. The sides of the mountains became covered with ten thousand rills, which joined their forces lower down, and developed into veritable cataracts, rushing with fearful and noisy tumult to the plain below.

Before many hours had passed, the streams everywhere overflowed their banks, and ran riot amongst the villages, and flowed like a sea against the city. There was no resisting this watery foe, and before night fell vast multitudes had been drowned in the seething floods from which there was no escape.

Meanwhile, carried swiftly along by the swollen current, Chung's little fleet sped safely down the stream, drawing further and further away from the doomed city.

The river had risen many feet since they had started on their voyage, and as they were passing by a high peak, which had been undermined by the rush of waters hurling themselves against its base, the boats were put into great danger by the whirl and commotion of the foam-flecked river. Just as they escaped from being submerged, the party noticed a small monkey struggling in the water, and at once picked it up and took it on board.

Further on they passed a large branch of a tree, on which there was a crow's nest, with one young one in it. This, also, remembering the solemn

injunction of the priest, they carefully took up and saved.

As they were rushing madly on down the tawny, swollen river, they were all struck with sudden excitement by seeing something struggling in the boiling waters. Looking at this object more attentively as they drew nearer to it, they perceived that it was a man, who seemed to be in great peril of his life.

Chung's tender heart was filled with sympathy, and he at once gave orders for the boatmen to go and rescue him. His wife, however, reminded him of the warning of the priest not to save any man on the river, as he would inevitably turn out to be an enemy, who would in time work his rescuer great wrong.

Chung replied that at such a time, when a human being was in extreme danger of being drowned, personal interests ought not to be considered at all. He had faithfully obeyed the command of the priest in saving animal life, but how much more valuable was a man than any of the lower orders of creation? "Whatever may happen," he said, "I cannot let this man drown before my eyes," and as the boat just then came alongside the swimmer, he was hauled into it and delivered from his peril.

After a few days, when the storm had abated and the river had gone down to its natural flow, Chung returned with his family to his home. To his immense surprise, he found that his house had not been damaged in the least. The gods who had

saved his life had used their supernatural powers to preserve even his property from the ruin and devastation that had fallen upon the inhabitants of the city and of the surrounding plain.

Shortly after they had settled down again, Chung enquired of Lo-yung, the man whom he had saved from the flood, whether he would not like to return to his family and his home.

"I have no family left," he answered with a sad look on his face. "All the members of it were drowned in the great flood from which you delivered me. What little property we had was washed away by the wild rush of the streams that overflowed our farm. Let me stay with you," he begged, "and give me the opportunity, by the devoted service of my life, to repay you in some slight degree for what you have done in saving my life."

As he uttered these words his tears began to flow, and his features showed every sign of profound emotion. Always full of tenderness and compassion, Chung was profoundly moved by the tears and sobs of Lo-yung, and hastened to assure him that he need be under no concern with regard to his future. "You have lost all your relatives, it is true, but from to-day I shall recognize you as my son. I adopt you into my family and I give you my name."

Six months after this important matter had been settled, the city was placarded with proclamations from its Chief Mandarin. In these he informed the people that he had received a most urgent Edict from the Emperor stating that an official seal, which

which was in constant use in high transactions of the State, had in a most mysterious manner disappeared and could not be found. He was therefore directed to inform the people that whoever informed His Majesty where the seal was, so that it could be recovered, would receive a considerable reward and would also be made a high mandarin in the palace of the Emperor.

That very night, whilst Chung was sleeping, a fairy appeared to him in a dream. "The gods have sent me," he said, "to give you one more proof of the high regard in which they hold you for your devotion to your fellow-men. The Emperor has lost a valuable seal which he is most anxious to recover, and he has promised large and liberal rewards to the man who shows him where it may be found. I want to tell you where the seal is. It lies at the bottom of the crystal well in the grounds behind the palace. It was accidentally dropped in there by the Empress-Dowager, who has forgotten all about the circumstance, but who will recollect it the moment she is reminded of it. I want you to send your own son to the capital to claim the reward by telling where the seal is."

When Chung awoke in the morning, he told his wife the wonderful news of what had happened to him during the night, and began to make preparations for his son to start for the capital without delay, in order to secure the honours promised by the Emperor. His wife, however, was by no means reconciled to the idea of parting with her son, and strongly opposed his going.

"Why are you so set upon the honours of this life that you are willing to be separated from your only child, whom perhaps you may never be able to see again?" she asked her husband, with tears in her eyes. "You are a rich man, you are beloved of the gods, you have everything that money can buy in this flowery kingdom. Why not then be contented and cease to long after the dignities which the State can confer, but which can never give you any real happiness?"

Just at that moment Lo-yung came in, and hearing the wonderful story, and seeing the distress of the mother, he volunteered to take the place of her son and go to the capital in his stead.

"I have never yet had the chance," he said, "of showing my gratitude to my benefactor for having saved my life, and for the many favours he has showered upon me. I shall be glad to undertake this journey. I shall have an audience with His Majesty and will reveal to him the place where the seal lies hidden, and I shall then insist that all the honours he may be prepared to bestow on me shall be transferred to your son, to whom of right they naturally belong."

It was accordingly arranged that Lo-yung should take the place of Chung's son, and preparations were at once made for his journey to the capital. As he was saying good-bye to his benefactor, the latter whispered in his ear: "If you succeed in your enterprise and the Emperor makes you one of his royal officers, do not let ingratitude ever enter your heart, so that you may be tempted to forget us

here, who will be thinking about you all the time you are away."

"Nothing of the kind can ever happen," exclaimed Lo-yung impetuously. "My gratitude to you is too firmly embedded within my heart ever to be uprooted from it."

On his arrival at the capital, he at once sought an interview with the Prime Minister, who, on hearing that a man wished to see him about a state matter of urgent importance, immediately admitted him to his presence. Lo-yung at once explained that he had come to reveal the place where the lost seal at that moment lay concealed. "I am perfectly ready to tell all I know about it," he said, "but if possible I should prefer to make it known to the Emperor himself in person."

"That can quickly be arranged," eagerly replied the Prime Minister, "for His Majesty is so anxious to obtain information about the seal, that he is prepared at any hour of the day or night to give an audience to anyone who can ease his mind on the subject."

In a few minutes a eunuch from the palace commanded the Prime Minister to come without delay to the Audience Hall and wait upon the Emperor. He was also to bring with him the person who said that he had an important communication to lay before the Throne.

When they arrived they found there not only the King, but also the Empress-Dowager, waiting to receive them. In obedience to a hasty command, Lo-yung told in a few words where the seal was,

and how it happened to be there. As he went on with the story the face of the Empress lit up with wonder, whilst a pleasing smile overspread it, as she recognized the truth of what Lo-yung was saying.

"But tell me," said the Emperor, "how you get all your information and how it is that you have such an intimate acquaintance with what is going on in my palace?'

Lo-yung then described how the Immortals in the Western Heaven, deeply moved by the loving character of Chung, and wishing to reward him and bring honour to his family, had sent a fairy, who appeared to him in a dream and told him the secret of the seal.

"Your home," said the Emperor, "must indeed be celebrated for benevolent and loving deeds to men, since even the fairies come down from the far-off Heaven to express their approbation. In accordance with my royal promise, I now appoint you to a high official position that will enrich you for life, for I consider that it will be for the welfare of my kingdom to have a man from a home, which the gods delight to honour, to assist me in the management of my public affairs."

From the moment when the royal favour was bestowed on Lo-yung, it seemed as though every particle of gratitude and every kindly remembrance of Chung had vanished completely out of his heart. He cut himself off from the home he had left only a few days ago, as completely as though it had never existed.

Weeks and months went by, but no news came

from him, and the heart of Chung was wrung with anguish, for he knew that Lo-yung's unnatural conduct would in the end bring retribution upon Lo-yung himself.

At last he determined to send his son, Keng, to the capital to find out what had really become of Lo-yung. Attended by one of his household servants, the young man reached his journey's end in a few days. On enquiring at his inn about Lo-yung, he was informed that he was a mandarin of great distinction in the city, and was under the special protection of the Emperor, whose favourite he was.

Hearing this joyful news, Keng, followed by his servant, at once hastened to the residence of Lo-yung, and was lucky enough to meet him as he rode out on horseback from his magnificent yamen, attended by a long retinue of officers and attendants.

Running up to the side of his horse, Keng cried out joyfully, "Ah! my brother, what a joy to meet you once more! How glad I am to see you!"

To his astonishment, Lo-yung, with a frown upon his face, angrily exclaimed: "You common fellow, what do you mean by calling me your brother? I have no brother. You are an impostor, and you must be severely punished for daring to claim kinship with me."

Calling some of the lictors in his train, he ordered them to beat Keng, and then cast him into prison, and to give strict injunctions to the jailer to treat him as a dangerous criminal. Wounded and bleeding from the severe scourging he had received, and in a terrible state of exhaustion, poor Keng was dragged

to the prison, where he was thrown into the deepest dungeon, and left to recover as best he might from the shock he had sustained.

His condition was indeed a pitiable one. Those who could have helped and comforted him were far away. He could expect no alleviation of his sorrows from the jailer, for the heart of the latter had naturally become hardened by having to deal with the criminal classes. Besides he had received precise orders from the great mandarin, that this particular prisoner was to be treated as a danger to society. Even if he had been inclined to deal mercifully with him, he dared not disobey such definite and stringent commands as he had received from his superior.

The prison fare was only just enough to keep body and soul together. Keng had no money with which to bribe the jailer to give him a more generous diet, and there was no one to guarantee that any extra expenses which might be incurred would ever be refunded to him.

And then a miracle was wrought, and once more the fairies interfered, this time to save the life of the only son of the man whose fame for tenderness and compassion had reached the far-off Western Heaven.

One morning, as Keng lay weary and half-starved on the blackened heap of straw that served him as a bed in the corner of the prison, a monkey climbed up and clung to the narrow gratings through which the light penetrated into his room. In one of its hands it held a piece of pork which it kept offering to Keng. Very much surprised, he got up to take

it, when to his delight he discovered that the monkey was the identical one which had been picked up by his father on the day of the great flood.

The same thing was repeated for several days in succession, and when the jailer asked for some explanation of these extraordinary proceedings, Keng gave him a detailed account of their wonderful deliverance by the fairies, the picking up of the monkey, and the rescue of Lo-yung, now the great mandarin, who was keeping him confined in prison. "Ah!" muttered the jailer under his breath, "the lower animals know how to show gratitude, but men do not."

A few days after this another messenger of the gods came to give his aid to Keng. A number of crows gathered on a roof which overlooked the narrow slits through which the prisoner could catch a glimpse of the blue sky. One of them flew on to the ledge outside, and Keng immediately recognized it as the one which had been saved from the floating branch in the turbid river. He was overjoyed to see this bird, and besought the jailer to allow him to write a letter to his father, telling him of his pitiful condition. This request was granted, and the document was tied to the leg of the crow, which flew away on its long flight to Chung with its important news.

Chung was greatly distressed when he read the letter that his son had written in prison, and with all the speed he could command, he travelled post haste to the capital. When he arrived there he made various attempts to obtain an interview with Lo-yung, but all in vain. The mandarin had not sense

enough to see that the threads of fate were slowly winding themselves around him, and would soon entangle him to his destruction.

Very unwillingly, therefore, because he still loved Lo-yung and would have saved him if possible, Chung entered an accusation against him before Pau-Kung, the famous criminal judge.

The result of the investigation was the condemnation of Lo-yung, whose execution speedily followed, whilst Keng was promoted to the very position that had been occupied by the man who had tried to work his ruin.

GLASGOW: PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.